





SIXTEEN
CASUISTICAL
SERMONS
PREACHED ON
Several Occasions.

By the Most Reverend Father in GOD,
Dr. *JOHN SHARP*,
Late Lord Archbishop of YORK.

VOL. III.

The FOURTH EDITION.

L O N D O N:

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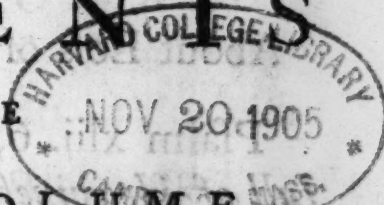
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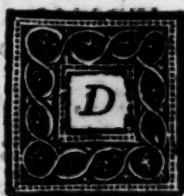


S E R M O N I.

P S A L. XLII. 6, 7.

According to the Translation of our *Liturgy*.

*Why art thou so full of Heaviness, O my Soul?
And why art thou so disquieted within me?
Put thy Trust in God, for I will yet give
him Thanks for the Help of his Countenance.*



DAVID, tho' a Man after God's own Heart, and dearly beloved by him, was as much exercised all his Life with Troubles and Afflictions of several Kinds, as almost any we read of. When he composed this Psalm, and that which followeth it, it sufficiently appears, that he was under great Perplexity and Consternation of Mind, which makes him three times speak to himself, *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? And why art thou disquieted within me?*

What the particular Occasion was, is not expressed in the Psalm: But it is generally believed, and it is very probably, that it was upon the Rebellion of his Son *Absalom*; by Occasion of which he was driven from *Jerusalem*,

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Salem, and so banished from the House of God in Mount *Sion*, where he had lately fix'd the Ark : And this Banishment of his is that which he is here so much concerned for, and so passionately bewails. Taking this Key, we are easily let into the Sense of both these Psalms : The former of which, so far as is needful for the right understanding this Text, I shall give you a brief Account of.

Thus he begins : As the hunted Deer panteth after the Brooks of Water, so panteth my Soul after thee, O God : My Soul thirsteth for God, yea, even for the living God : When shall I come and appear before God ? that is, when shall I be so happy as to have Access again to thy Tabernacle, where thou dost manifest thy Presence, and from whence I am now driven by them that seek my Life ? And then he goes on in the third Verse, *My Tears have been my Meat Day and Night ; while they daily say unto me, Where is now thy God ?* that is to say, I am wholly given over to Grief and Sorrow, whilst I hear the continual Reproaches of my Enemies, saying unto me, What is become of thy God, in whom thou wast wont to repose so much Confidence ? When I remember these Things, (as he goes on in the 4th Verse) *I pour out my Soul in me : For I had gone with the Multitude : I went with them to the House of God with the Voice of Joy and Praise, with a Multitude that kept Holy-Days ;* that is, it even breaks my Heart to call to Mind those happy Days,

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Days, when I brought thine Ark to Mount Sion, accompanied with the joyful Acclamations of all thy People, and to think of all the other blessed Times, when, before this Banishment, we met together at thy House to worship and praise thy Name. And then follow in the next Verse the Words of my Text, *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? why art thou so disquieted within me?* As if he had said, Be not for all this discouraged, tho' it be as sad a Calamity as is possible, to be thus deprived of the Opportunity of worshipping God in publick, yet there is no Reason thou shouldst be utterly dejected, and abandon thyself to Despair: No, put thy Trust in God; for I shall yet give him Thanks for the Help of his Countenance: That is, A Time, I hope, will come, when I shall again go to his House, and praise him still for his Favours towards me, in delivering me from this, as well as my former Afflictions.

This is the natural Account and Meaning of the Words, as they lie in the Psalm, and as they were spoken by the Psalmist. But in the Discourse which I design upon this Text, I mean not to confine myself to the particular Case, upon Occasion of which these Words were spoken, but to take a larger Compass, and to treat of Trouble of Mind in general, as far as it is upon a Religious Account.

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There are a great many good People among us, who are afflicted with that which we call Religious Melancholy. It is for the sake of these, that I have now pitched upon this Text, as thinking it may be very fitly applied to their Case, tho' their Troubles are of a different Nature from those that *David* was here exercised with, and arise from different Causes. And that which I propose to do, is to consider the several Things that are most apt to disturb them, and to render their Lives miserable and uncomfortable, and to give such an Account of those Things, as that they may be satisfied, that they have all the Reason in the World, notwithstanding them, to apply *David's* Words in my Text to their own Case, and to say with him, *Why art thou so cast down, O my Soul? why art thou so disquieted within me? Put thy Trust in God, for I shall yet give him Thanks for the Help of his Countenance*; or, as he otherwise expresseth it in the last Verse of this Psalm: *For I will yet thank him, which is the Help of my Countenance, and my God.*

This, I say, is what I design upon this Text; but before I engage in that Work, it will not be amiss, if we a little insist on these Words with reference to the particular Occasion upon which they were spoken; and this shall be my business at this Time.

Now the Text thus considered, doth afford us two practical Observations. First; From hence we gather, that to a good Man, the
being

being deprived of Opportunities of worshipping God in Publick, is one of the greatest Afflictions. Secondly; That in this and all other Afflictions that befall us, the proper Remedy is to put our Trust in God,

I. I begin with the First, That to be deprived of the Opportunity of God's publick Worship, is to a good Man a most grievous Affliction.

We see how sadly *David* here bemoans himself upon that Account, with what Anguish he remembers those happy Days, when he had free Access to the House of God, and the holy Assemblies of his People; and how passionately he longs for those Days again. He takes no Notice of the unnatural Rebellion of his Son *Absalom*, which could not but go to the very Heart of so tender a Father as he was: He takes no Notice of the Danger his Life was in from the Conspirators; but all that he seems concerned about, is that by these Means he is banished from God's Presence; that is, from his Sanctuary, from his House, from the Society of the Faithful, where he used to praise the Name of his God, and to partake of his divine Influence.

Indeed the Happiness and the Blessings that good Men enjoy in the publick Exercise of their Religion, and in the worshipping God in his House, and partaking of his Sacraments, are so many and great, that they must needs account the being deprived of them a

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Loss unsupportable. Of all the Pleasures on this side Heaven, those are the most valuable: For indeed, they approach nearest to those in which the Saints do spend their Days in their heavenly Mansions. What can be more like Heaven upon Earth, than a Company of pious devout Souls met in one Place, having God in the midst of them, and there partaking of his Communications, devoting themselves to his Service, professing their Faith and Hope in Christ, and their Dependence upon him, and joining Hearts and Voices with the heavenly Hosts of Angels, in singing out the everlasting Praises of their Creator and Redeemer; in declaring his wonderful Works of Love and Mercy, and in adoring his infinite Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness, which are conspicuous to all the World?

O how must a devout Soul be ravished with these Exercises! O how dry and insipid will the highest of sensual Gratifications appear to him, in Comparison of the delicious Relish that these divine Employments will leave upon his Spirit! He that once tastes the Sweets of these, cannot forbear crying out with *David* in the 84th Psalm, *O how amiable are thy Dwellings, thou Lord of Hosts! My Soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the Courts of the Lord: My Heart and my Flesh crieth out for the living God.* He will even envy the Sparrow, that hath found her an House, and the Swallow, that hath built her

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a Nest, wherein to lay her Young so near unto the Altar of the Lord, his King, and his God: He will say unto God in the Words of the same Divine Psalmist, *Blessed are they that dwell in thy House, they will be still praising thee; for one Day in thy Courts is better than a Thousand: Nay, I had rather be a Door-keeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Ungodliness.* This must needs be the Sense of every one that truly loves God, and therefore it may easily be imagined, how near it will go to the Heart of such a one, to have these so inestimable Privileges taken from him.

When the Ark of God (which was in those Days the Symbol of his Presence among his People, and from whence he used to manifest himself to them) was taken by the *Philistines*, the Loss of it was such a Blow to the good old *Eli*, that the very News of it killed him: He patiently bore the Relation of the Death of his two Sons; but when the Messenger came to mention to him the Ark's being carried away, the Text tells us, *He fell off from his Seat backwards, and died,* 1 Sam. iv. 18.

These Things being so, how ought every one of us to prize and value that free Liberty which we of this Nation, thro' the Favour of God, enjoy, of resorting to the House of the Lord, and partaking of the Means of Salvation! Oh how thankful ought we to be for this unspeakable Mercy! How fervently ought

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we pray for the Continuance of it ! And how industrious should we be, in improving it to good Purposes, now whilst God affords it ! O how zealously should we all be disposed to the Service of our God ! How diligent in taking all Opportunities of attending it ! How serious and devout while we are in it ! How frequent in our Approaches to the holy Table, which is the most solemn Part of it !

O let us not by our Unthankfulness to God for the Light of his Gospel, and our Neglect of, or Unprofitableness under, those Means which he graciously dispenseth to us, render ourselves unworthy of them, and give him Occasion to remove our Candlestick from us ! Let us remember, that the Primitive Christians would have bought the Privileges we now enjoy at any Rate in the World, but could not obtain them. Many Prophets and righteous Men, as our Saviour said in another Case, desired to see the Things that we see, and could not see them. But if we make light of them, a Time may come, when they may be hid from our Eyes also ; a Time may come, when the Kingdom of God shall be taken from us, and given to a Nation that will bring forth the Fruit of it, as our Saviour speaks, *Matth. xxi. 43.*

Secondly, From hence we may see how much two Sorts of Persons among us are to be reprov'd.

First, Those who tho' they do indeed frequent God's House, and his publick Worship, yet

yet do not find that Sweetness, and Pleasure, and Satisfaction, in so doing, as to be in a Capacity of looking upon it as so great and unvaluable a Blessing, as the Psalmist doth here account it: Tho' they join with the Congregation in the Prayers of the Church, yet their Hearts are not touched with that lively and grateful Sense of God in these Exercises, as to render them truly delightful. On the contrary, they are heavy and listless in these Offices; their Thoughts are employed about quite different Objects than what they should be; they serve God with mere Lip-labour, nay, and too many, it is to be feared, do not serve him at all, but come thither either for Fashion's sake, or to gratify their Curiosity, or sometimes, perhaps, out of worse Ends. Oh! If we did truly love God, and make it our Business seriously to recommend ourselves to his Favour, I am sure we should look upon his publick Worship as the very Joy of our Hearts, and long for all Opportunities of being present at it. And when we were so, we should mind it wholly; and every Day so employed we should account a good Day to our Souls. It is not of hearing Sermons that I now speak; tho' by some, the Whole, in a Manner, of God's Worship is placed in that. No, tho' it cannot be denied but that That is an Exercise very profitable, nay, necessary to a great many People, who perhaps would know nothing of Religion, unless they heard something of it in Sermons; yet it is publick
lick

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lick Prayer and Thanksgiving, and commemorating the Death of our Saviour, and offering up ourselves as holy and acceptable Sacrifices to him that died for us; it is in these Things that the Life of the Christian's Worship doth consist, and from which the true Pleasure doth arise. And where-ever these Things are neglected, or coldly performed, it is a great Argument there is but little Devotion in the Heart.

But, *Secondly*, How much to be reprov'd are they, that when Churches are opened, and solemn Times set apart for Christians to appear before God, and pay their Homage to him, yet seldom or never afford their Presence there; but live in an habitual Neglect, if not Contempt, of the publick Duties of Religion! Where is the Religion of such Persons? What Sense can they pretend to have of God? Or what Concernment of their own Souls? That which the pious King of *Israel* thought to be his greatest Affliction, namely, the not being present at the publick Service of God, these Men make their Choice, and their Privilege. That which the first Christians took to be the greatest Punishment that could be inflicted, namely, to be excommunicated and debarred from joining together with their Brethren in the Worship of Christ Jesus, these Persons inflict upon themselves; cutting themselves off from all the Benefits of Christianity, by a voluntary Excommunication from the sacred Assemblies.

II. But

II. But I proceed to the second general Point observable from this Text, and that is this; That to put our Trust in God, is the proper Means to keep our Souls from being cast down or disquieted under any Affliction.

This is that, which *David* found a sovereign Remedy in all the Distresses that he fell into. And therefore no Wonder that in this present Distress of his Banishment from the House of God, he calls upon himself to make use of it: *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? why art thou so disquieted within me? Put thy Trust in God, for I shall yet give him Thanks for the Help of his Countenance; I shall give him Thanks, who is the Help of my Countenance, and my God.*

Now an intire Trust and Dependence upon God, is an effectual Remedy against the Evil of Afflictions in these three Respects:

First, As it is a Mean of supporting them with Ease and Patience.

Secondly, As it is an Evidence for ourselves, that we do that which we know is highly acceptable to God.

Thirdly, As it is the best way to obtain Deliverance from the Afflictions we are under.

First of all, To put our whole Trust in God, and to depend upon him in all Things, is the best Course we can take to be at Ease and Peace within ourselves, howsoever Things go. For it takes away all the Solitude that is upon us, how to get rid of the pre-

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present Evils, and prevent the Fear of those that are to come. And it strangely bears up the Soul under the Pain and Anguish of the most grievous Sufferings; and makes them at least supportable to us. A Man that firmly confides in God, will always be in a tolerable happy Condition, under the worst Things that can befall him; but in most of the common Afflictions of his Life, that render other Men very miserable, he will be very chearful and well pleased. And the Reason is, because to trust and depend upon God, implies a firm Belief, not only of the Goodness of God's Providence in general, but also of his Love and Care of us in particular. Now whosoever is heartily persuaded of that, and doth withal seriously attend to it, how can he be but well contented in all the Circumstances of this Life? For to consider, that, however to profane and atheistical Men, all Events seem to happen by Chance, or to owe their Production to the blind and necessary Agency of natural Things, yet in Truth, there is an infinite Wisdom and Foresight that steers and governs the great Engine of the World, managing and ordering the Motions of the several Parts, so as to contribute to the Welfare and Preservation of the Whole; and to consider that this Providence is not only confined to Generals, but extends itself even to every Thing and Person in the whole Creation; so that a Sparrow doth not fall to the Ground without the Will

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Will of our Father, and the very Hairs of our Heads are numbered: No Condition we are in, no Accident that doth befall us, but is brought to pass by the Counsel and Approbation of the Governor of the World: And to consider farther, that the Measure of this Government and Providence is not arbitrary Will, but infinite and perfect Goodness: That God doth not dispense any Event unto us out of mere Humour, (as many of us deal with our Fellow-creatures) much less because he bears any Ill-will to us, but because he clearly sees it is good for us, or for the World, ours, or the publick Necessities call for it. So that we are always absolutely certain, that Things are carried on by the best Way that it is possible for them to be, and if they were otherwise than they are, it would not be so well. I say, for a good Man seriously to believe and consider this, how can he be much uneasy or discontented at any Accident that befalls him, tho' it may perhaps be very troublesome to the sensible Nature? For he knows that he is in those Circumstances that God sees fittest for him; that is, he is in the best Circumstances, all Things considered, that he can be in, at that Time: He knows, if he had been his own Carver, he should have chosen worse for himself: He knows, he has One that takes care of him, that provides for him, and One that understands infinitely better than himself, what is his true Interest, and makes
most

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most for his Advantage : And, tho' he doth not understand the particular Tendencies of Things ; tho' he doth not see at present how this or the other Thing, that looks untowardly or mischievously, should work either to his own private, or to the publick Advantage ; yet he knows, in the general, that all is well intended, that God can and will bring Good out of the greatest Evils, and at last all Things will prove for the best, not only to the World in general, but to him in particular, if he truly loves God.

These Things now being all contained or implied in that which we call Trust in God, it must needs be an excellent Expedient against all Dejection and Disquiet of Mind, let our Condition be what it will.

This is the first Thing. But, Secondly, An intire Trust and Confidence in God is a good Remedy against the Evil of Afflictions, as it is an Evidence to us, that we are qualified for his Mercy and Favour ; seeing we do that, which is most highly acceptable to him, and doth in a particular Manner recommend us to his Love.

Trusting in God is, at all Times, both an Exercise and Expression of our Religion, and a great Evidence to ourselves of our Sincerity in it : But it is especially so, when we are in any evil or difficult Circumstances, then when we are under great Temptations and Perplexities, then when we are encompassed with Dangers, and have no Prospect of Help
or

or Deliverance by human Means, which way soever we look; then, I say, to bear up, and exercise Faith in God, and to support ourselves in this evil Plight with the Confidence of his Goodness to us, as it is a comfortable Argument that our Virtue and Piety is real, and not only pretended; so it is a Thing that God doth highly esteem where-ever he sees it, and will not fail to reward it; and this is a Consideration that should mightily excite us to the Practice of this Duty.

Many Sorrows (saith the Psalmist, *Psal. xxxii. 10. Many Sorrows*) *shall be to the Wicked; but whose putteth his Trust in the Lord, Mercy embraceth him on every Side.* And again, *The Lord taketh no Pleasure in the Strength of an Horse, neither delighteth he in any Man's Legs.* It is not the Bustle we make to save ourselves by human Means, that is acceptable to him: But what then? *Why, the Lord's Delight is in them that fear him, and in them that put their Trust in his Mercy.* To put our Trust in God's Mercy, is a Thing that is delightful to him, a Thing that he taketh especial Pleasure in: And accordingly, blessed is he pronounced by the Prophet, who trusteth in the Lord, and whose Hope the Lord is; but, on the contrary, *Cursed be the Man that maketh Flesh his Arm, and whose Heart departeth from the Lord,* Jer. xvii. 5.

Indeed Reason itself would teach us, tho' we had no Revelation for it, that this Trust
and

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and Dependence upon God, that we speak of, must needs be a most lovely Quality, and that which above all Things must endear us to our Maker; for it is an undeniable Proof, that we think worthily of God, and that we have such Apprehensions of him as he would desire we should have, or as it is fit Creatures should have of the most perfect Being. It shews, as I said before, not only that we acknowledge him to be the great Disposer of all Events, and that all the good Things we have, or hope for, come from his Bounty; but also that we are deeply affected with a Sense of his Goodness; that we are heartily persuaded that he loves us, and will deny us nothing that is convenient for us. Now thus to think of God, is truly to honour him, and expresseth more Piety and Devotion a great deal, than anxious Prayers and Supplications to him: Those argue Love to ourselves; but this is an Evidence that we truly love God.

On the other Side, to be without this Trust and Affiance in God, and to place our Hopes and Confidence in second Causes, is certainly a Piece of Impiety and Irreligion, where-ever it is found: And therefore is justly stiled by the Prophet, in the forecited Place, a departing from God; for it either shews, that we have no Sense of God upon our Minds, nor take any Notice of his Government of the World; or, if we do, it shews that we have mean Thoughts of him, and
believe

believe either that he cannot or will not supply our Wants and Necessities. And even what Man is there, among ourselves, that would not take it very ill, to be thus represented, or thus thought on, by any Child of his that depends upon him?

Thirdly and lastly: Trusting in God may therefore be recommended, as an effectual Remedy in all Afflictions, because it is the best Means to obtain Deliverance from them.

It is not in Man (saith Solomon) to direct his Steps: Walk he never so cautiously, he cannot secure himself from falling into a thousands Evils, to which this State of Mortality is daily exposed: And, when he is in them, he cannot, by all the Wit he has, or all the Industry he can use, get himself clear again: He may make a Stir, and be restless, and impatient, but he gets no other Good many times by his struggling, than what wild Beasts do that are caught in a Snare; namely, the farther entangling themselves: He may diligently apply himself to this or the other Mean for Comfort or Redress, but he will too often find his Endeavours ineffectual: When he has done all he can, God is the Governor of the World, and dispenseth Good and Evil to the Sons of Men, when, and to whom, and so long as he pleaseth; and, therefore, from him only can we expect Ease or Deliverance from those Things that oppress us; and the general Way, that he hath appointed for this End,

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is, patiently to wait upon him, and to trust in his Mercy; so will he in due Time shew himself our Saviour and Deliverer.

We speak not this to discourage the Use of any lawful Means, either for the preventing or removing our evil Circumstances: On the contrary, it is by them, that God ordinarily worketh his Deliverances, both for his People in general, and for every Servant of his in particular; and therefore they are not to be neglected. But this we say, without the Blessing of God no Means will be effectual, and if we have his Blessing, we shall not fail of Redemption from all our Troubles, of what Nature soever they be, when he sees fit; tho' there appear no visible Means at present, or, tho' those, that do appear, seem never so unlikely or insufficient. And farther, the proper Way to obtain this Blessing of his, is intirely to depend upon him, to confide in his Goodness, to be careful for nothing, but in every thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving to make our Requests known unto him.

This the holy Psalmist did continually experience all his Life long; and this he declares and recommends as a standing Truth, to all succeeding Generations, in so many Passages of his Psalms, that it would be troublesome to quote them. *The Lord, saith he, never faileth them that put their Trust in him. Trust thou in the Lord, and be doing good, so shalt thou dwell in the Land, and verily thou shalt*

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Shalt be fed. Commit thy Ways unto the Lord, and put thy Trust in him, and he shall bring it to pass: The Salvation of the Righteous cometh of the Lord, who is a present Help in Time of Trouble; he shall deliver them, he shall save them, because they put their Trust in him.

The Truth is, God very often afflicts good Men, for this very Reason, that they may the more trust in him, that they may fit looser from the World, and the Enjoyments thereof; that they may see the Vanity of all earthly Things; and exercise a more lively Faith and Dependence upon his Providence; which being so, it cannot be doubted, but that this is a certain Mean to get their Afflictions removed; for take away the Cause, and the Effect ceaseth. If their not trusting in God was the Cause of their Affliction, then their hearty Affiance in him will be the Mean to set them free from it.

It is true, indeed, the Deliverances that God works for his Children, are not always such as they desire or pray for; he is many times not pleased to remove his Hand, in that Instance they are apt to wish he would; but still we say, he doth deliver them. If he doth not answer their Prayers, and their Hopes, in kind; yet, if he gives them Grace and Strength to undergo what he lays upon them, and bestows other Blessings upon them, which are more needful for them than those

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they would have, is not this as great a Kindness and Mercy to them? Certainly it is.

O therefore, whatever the Event of Things be, whatever Flesh and Blood suggest to us, let us fix this as an immoveable Principle in our Hearts, that to trust in God, and cheerfully to depend upon him, in a constant Adherence to our Duty, is the most effectual Course we can take, both to support us under all Afflictions, and to deliver us from them.

And now what remains, but that every one of us should be seriously exhorted to put all this in Practice; in every ungrateful and displeasing Circumstance of Life that we light into, to put our Trust in God as the Help of our Countenance, and our God? We should, without doubt, speedily find the Ease and Comfort of so doing; let our Afflictions be of what Nature they will, this is an Antidote that will reach them all. Are we troubled about our private Concernments in this World? Do not our Designs or Endearments succeed as we expected? Or are we in a poor low Condition, and hard put to it to live? Or are our dearest Relations taken from us? Or do we groan under the Bondage of harsh Parents, or cruel Masters, or under the Misery of having wicked and undutiful Children? Why, in all these Cases let us say to our souls, as *David* here in the Text did, *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? Why art thou disquieted within me? Put thy Trust in God,* And if we do thus, we shall assuredly be in a
Condition

fidence in him ! Our Care, and Trouble, and Solicitude about our Affairs, is as great, as if all Things came to pass by Chance, or Fate, or the Will of Man : Our Fears and our Hopes do altogether depend upon second Causes. We are indeed apt enough to trust God with our Souls, not caring how little Thought we take about them ; but, as for our worldly Concernments, we will not trust him any farther, than as we see we have the Means of accomplishing our Designs in our own Hands. But this is a base, unthankful, unworthy Practice : For Shame let us quit it ; let us shake off this dull, earthly, stupid Humour ; let us cast our Eyes up to the Author and Preserver of our Beings, and, like Men, make use of the Reason and Understanding that he hath given us, not living altogether by Sense, as the brute Beasts do, but exercising Faith in the Goodness and Power of God. By this Mean we shall best approve ourselves to him, and most consult our own Interests : By this Mean we shall obtain of him to be our Saviour and mighty Deliverer in all Dangers, and shall for ever have Cause to give him Thanks, who is the Help of our Countenance, and our God.

*We humbly beseech thee, O Father Almighty,
to look upon our Infirmities, and for the
Glory of thy Name, &c.*



S E R M O N II.

P S A L M, XLII. 6, 7.

According to the Translation of our *Liturgy*.

*Why art thou so full of Heaviness, O my Soul?
And why art thou so disquieted within me?
Put thy Trust in God, for I will yet give
him Thanks for the Help of his Countenance.*



HAVING, the last Time, given you an Account of the Occasion and Scope of these Words, as they were spoken by the Psalmist, and treated of such practical Points, as may be deduced from them, as so considered; I now come to that which I chiefly designed when I pitched upon this Text, which was, as I told you, to speak to the Case of those People among us, that are troubled with religious Melancholy.

And here, that which I propose to do, is, to consider the several Things that are most apt to disturb them, and which are wont to create great Uneasiness, and Trouble, and Perplexity to their Minds, and to give such an
Account

Account of these Things, as that every good Man may be satisfied, that there is no Reason that, for the Sake of them, his Soul should be cast down, or his Spirit disquieted within him; but, on the contrary, that he ought to praise God, and to look upon him as the Help of his Countenance, and his God, as *David* expresseth it in this Psalm.

But, before I engage in this Argument, it is fit I should give you a more particular Account of what I mean by religious Melancholy, and how it is distinguished from other Sorts of Trouble of Mind, that are incident to Mankind.

First of all, There is a Melancholy and Dejection of Spirit occasioned by worldly Things, such as Sicknes, or Poverty, or Distress, or Loss of Friends, or bad Children and Relations, or some other outward Cross or Disappointment, which either is come upon us, or we fear will do. But now this is not that Trouble of Mind I am here concerned with, tho' it be the most common Trouble that exerciseth the Minds of Men.

Secondly, There is a Trouble of Mind upon a religious Account, which most Men, both good and bad, have sometimes Experience of, which likewise is far different from that religious Melancholy I am here to speak of. There is no good Man that at any time falls into a Sin, or doth any Action that he believes to be displeasing to God, but he must needs be troubled in Conscience for it, and
heartily

heartily vexed in his own Mind, that he should be so foolish, and so ungrateful to his great Benefactor. He will truly be sorry for his Fault, and patiently confess it, and earnestly beg Pardon for it. But then it is not his Infelicity to be thus troubled, and afflicted, (as the Case is with them that are religiously melancholy) but it is his Duty and his Advantage: For this is a Mean whereby he must be restored to the Favour of God, and to his own Peace and Quiet of Mind; and it is the best Preservative likewise against his falling again into the same Fault. And so for bad Men, those that live in any Course of Vice or wilful Sin, there are few of them but are sometimes much troubled in Mind, and feel a great Load of Melancholy upon their Spirits, when they reflect upon their spiritual Condition: Many Occasions are, by the Providence of God, thrown in their Way, which seldom fail of putting them in Mind of their sinful Lives, and of the Danger they are in upon Account thereof. And, if these Reflections be serious, they cannot but be accompanied with a great deal of Horror and Amazement. But, however they stifle these Thoughts in the Time of their Health, yet when they come to be on their sick Beds, and expect nothing but Death; then many of them are most terribly awaken'd, their Consciences then fly in their Faces, and in a miserable Agony they are upon account of their former ungodly Life, and would give all the World to be rid of those dismal Apprehen-

prehenfions they have of themfelves, and of their own everlafting Condition.

But this Trouble likewise is nothing but what is reasonable, and, confidering their Circumftances, very neceffary for them. It is not a Melancholy grounded upon a Conceit, or Imagination, or Mifapprehenfion of Things; for really they have great Reafon to be thus difquieted and afflicted in their own Minds, and they muft be fenfelefs and ftupid, if they were not. And it is a Mercy of God to them, that they are thus awakened; for, if ever they repent, and come to good, it muft in all Probability be by fuch Beginnings as thefe.

But, *Thirdly*, there is another kind of religious Trouble of Mind, which none but good Men, or thofe that defire fo to be, are fubject to: Which yet is different from that religious Melancholy, that is now under my Confideration. That which I mean, is that Trouble which arifes from our Irrefolution or Doubtfulnefs about the Goodnefs or Badnefs of Actions. When, in any Cafe that we happen to be engaged in, we are at a Lofs how to determine ourfelves, as fearing that, if we act this way, we fin; if we act the other way, we may fin likewise. Thefe Kind of Doubts or Scruples do often render the Minds of well-meaning Perfons very uneafy, even fometimes in fuch Inftances as another Man, and he an honeft Man too, would find no Difficulty at all in. It may indeed and doth fometimes happen, that this Perplexity and Scrupulofity
about

The Second Sermon.

about Actions, doth proceed from Distemper and Indisposition of Body; and, where it doth so, it is a Spice of that religious Melancholy I am here to speak of; but, generally, it proceeds from Ignorance of Things, and the false Notions Men have taken up about the Measure of Actions, from their Education, or Conversation, and the like. And, when these are once removed, and the Man comes to form a right Judgment of Things, there is an End of the Scruples or Doubts, and consequently of all that Trouble they were the Cause of.

But, *Fourthly*, as for that Sort of Trouble of Mind, which we properly call religious Melancholy, and which is my present Argument; the best Account I can give of it is this, That it is a Dejection of Mind occasioned from the Temperament, or most commonly from the Distemperature, of the Body, accompanied with unreasonable Fears, and Frights, about our spiritual Condition.

We cannot but have observed, (at least they must, that have ever had to do with Mens Souls) that they are a great many Persons who, as far as we can judge, either by their Conversation, or by that Account they give of themselves, (which they give in such Circumstances too, that no Man can suspect that they counterfeit) are very innocent and virtuous Persons, and have a hearty Sense of God and Religion upon their Minds, and would not, for all the World, do any thing that they know to be sinful: And who consequently may, with very good Reason,

son, be looked upon to be the true Disciples of Jesus Christ, and as such accepted of God. Yet these Persons, though they have as little Reason as any to be troubled about their spiritual Estate, and far less than most of Mankind, who live without any such Trouble; yet such is their Infelicity, that they are often grievously dejected, and under sad Fears and Perplexities, even to that Degree, as sometimes to think themselves the most miserable Wretches that breathe. So that in Truth there is none in Mankind can live a more uncomfortable Life, than they do: Nay, even at their Death, when they stand most in need of Comfort, yet now and then it happens that they cannot rid themselves of those frightful and dismal Apprehensions.

If we enquire into the Causes of these their Troubles, or how it comes to pass, that these Persons are thus afflicted and disturbed more than other Men, I should be loth to assign these two, that they themselves look upon to be the true ones, that is to say, either that God has forsaken them and left them to themselves, or that it is the Devil, that is always busy about them, and raiseth those Tumults and Disturbances in their Minds.

For as for the first, I doubt not but that these Persons are as much under the Protection, and Care, and Guidance of God Almighty, as those that were never thus exercised; and,

as

The Second Sermon.

as for the Devil, they neither gave him Opportunity, nor is he, I hope, ordinarily permitted to be so busy about them, as they are apt to imagine. No; I take it, that the principal Causes, and the Foundation of all their Troubles, lie in the ill Habit of their Bodies: Their animal Spirits, which the Soul makes use of as her Instruments in the Performance of all her rational Operations; these animal Spirits, I say, are vitiated and disordered by Fumes arising from Hypochondriac Affections, and that gives the first Occasion to the Disorder of their Minds.

That what I say is true, sufficiently appears from this; namely, that those who are constantly and habitually thus troubled in Mind, are known, by a great many Symptoms, not only to be Persons of a melancholy Complexion, but also to be highly under the Power of Hypochondriac Melancholy; and those that are not frequently under these Troubles, but only sometimes, may observe of themselves, that these Troubles have usually come upon them, either upon some heavy Cross and Affliction that has befallen them, or some great Sickness of which they were not well recovered, or some other natural Cause, that hath put their Bodies into some Weakness or Indisposition; and, when that has been removed, they have been as well in their Minds as they were before. But this is not all, though it be true, as I have said, that the Seat of this Trouble of
Mind

Mind is in the Body, which is by some Occasion or other out of Order, yet it is not from hence alone that all the Trouble doth proceed; for then all hypochondriacal Persons would be thus afflicted: There is something in the Mind itself, of which this Distemperature of the Body doth commonly take Advantage for the making all that Stir, and Disorder, and Confusion, that such Persons feel in themselves; and this without Doubt is some frightful and uncomfortable Notions or Opinions, which the Men have happened to take up in Matters of Religion, which, upon Examination, will be found either to be plain Mistakes, or, if they be true, yet the Men do miserably misapply them to their own Case.

Now, when a melancholy hypochondriacal Person, that is by his Temper inclined to be serious, and devout, and religious, hath unluckily leavened his Mind with such false Principles, or, through want of Skill, makes such Misapplication of true ones; it cannot be avoided but when he comes to view himself in such a Glass as this, which is of his own framing, and to make a Judgment of his own spiritual Features, and the Condition of his Soul therefrom, he must needs do it mightily to his own Disadvantage, and consequently create to himself a World of Trouble, and Disquiet, and Anxiety (more than he needs to do.)

Admitting

The Second Sermon.

Admitting now this to be a true Account of that which we call religious Melancholy, you see there are two Things necessary to be done, in order to the Cure or Removal of it.

First, That the Persons afflicted with it do take Care of their Bodies, that they be put into a better State of Health and Vigour, and freed from all hypochondriac Fumes that do oppress them.

Secondly, That they endeavour to get their Minds truly informed about those Matters of Religion, from which their Disease doth, as I may say, take a Handle to vex and disturb them.

To prescribe Rules about the first of these, belongs to the Physician, and therefore I shall not pretend to meddle therein: But the second Thing is a proper Subject for a Divine, and accordingly I shall discourse of it, as far as I have been acquainted with Cases of this Nature, though, to speak my Thoughts freely, I must needs say, that in many of these Cases the Physician's Part is every whit as necessary, if not more, than that of the Divine; for, if the bodily Indisposition was removed, most of the Fears, and Frights, and Disturbances, that happen upon a religious Account, would vanish of themselves: At least, the Persons would be capable of receiving full Satisfaction about those Matters, from the prudent Instructions and Discourses of those whom they consulted; whereas, while the
Root

Root of the Disease (I mean that ill Ferment of the Blood and Spirits) remains in the Body, the most comfortable Discourses that can be made to them about their spiritual Condition (tho' to the By-standers, that hear them, they appear never so wise and rational) will often have but little Effect upon them, Or if they do give them some Ease and Satisfaction for the present, yet in a little Time their Troubles and Fears return again, and are as impetuous as they were before.

I know that many of these, that are afflicted with this Malady, will not easily give Credit to what I now say. A Man, for instance, that is troubled with horrid blasphemous Thoughts, which is one of the Cases I shall hereafter speak to, will think it strange that you should advise him, for the Cure of Sin, to make use of Physick and Exercise, and such other Methods, as are prescribed to valetudinary Persons, for the Recovery of their Health: Why, saith he, I am well enough in Body; I eat, I drink, I sleep; all my Disease is in my Mind: I would be rid of these wicked Thoughts, that do continually haunt me and torment me, and what can Physick or Exercise contribute to that? I have Need of a spiritual Physician. Why thus far he is indeed in the right, a spiritual Physician may do him some Service, and give him some Comfort by convincing him, (if he be capable of it) that these Thoughts of his, how wicked and blasphemous soever they are,

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shall do him no Harm, so long as he doth not consent to them: That he is never the worse for them; that they shall never come into his Account, at the Day of Judgment. But this is all he can do; he cannot, I doubt, put him into a Way of getting rid of these Thoughts, which is the main Thing he desires; for that cannot be done, but by the Alteration of the State of his Body, from the ill Disposition of which, all these Thoughts do arise. But now, the Man being ignorant of this, and having no Notion how his Body should thus affect his Soul, as to the making her think after this or that Manner, (which yet it certainly doth) cannot readily entertain any Advices that are given to him, with relation to that; tho' yet he will find, upon Trial, that it is from hence only that his Cure must be perfected.

And now, having premised this, in order to the shewing what Sort of Relief the Application of theological Remedies will afford to Persons in these Cases, I come to speak to the Cases themselves. And these indeed are various, as various as are Mens Tempers, and the Opinions they have taken up about Religion. Two of the most common ones, namely, those two that I have already given a Hint of, I mean to speak to, in this, and the following Discourses, that I design to make upon this Argument; deferring the others to future Opportunities, as they come in my Way.

The

The first is the Case of those that are in the State of Desertion, as we commonly call it, that are deprived of all the spiritual Comforts they used to find in their Duty, and thereupon think that they are forsaken of God.

The second is the Case of those that think themselves given up to the Power of the Devil, upon Account of a Multitude of wicked blasphemous Thoughts and Fancies which do continually haunt their Minds, do what they can to the contrary.

Now, both these Cases I shall endeavour to give such an Account of, that the Persons concerned in them may be satisfied, that they may, and ought to apply *David's Words* in my Text to themselves, and to say with him, *Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? why art thou so disquieted within me? Put thy Trust in God; for I shall yet give him Thanks, who is the Help of my Countenance, and my God.*

I begin with the first; the Case of Desertion. Many pious and devout People we have known, that are under terrible Apprehensions that God hath forsaken them, and withdrawn his Presence and Assistance from them, and left them wholly to themselves.

If we ask them, what makes them think so? Why, they tell you, they have lost all that Joy and Comfort that used to fill their Souls: They cannot pray, nor give Thanks, nor receive the Sacrament, with that Devotion and Satisfaction they used to do; their Hearts are altogether dead as to all spiritual Exercise:

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Whence now, say they, can this proceed, but from God's forsaking them, and withdrawing his gracious Influence from them, that he was pleased formerly to vouchsafe them?

Two Things I shall do in speaking to this Case.

First, I shall shew what it is for God to forsake a Man, and that they have no Reason to believe that they are in that State.

Secondly, I shall give an Account of the true Causes from whence these Effects do proceed, which they attribute to God's forsaking them.

I begin with the first. Two Notions of God's forsaking Men we meet with in the Scripture. The one with respect to their outward Circumstances, and it consists in God's withdrawing his outward Blessings from them. The other is with respect to their spiritual Condition, and consists in God's withdrawing his inward Grace from them.

It is in the first of these Senses, I do verily believe, that *David* so often, in the *Psalms*, complains of God's forsaking him; of his hiding his Face from him; of his absenting himself, and shutting up his loving Kindness in Displeasure; and, if any one will carefully peruse the *Psalms*, where these and such-like Expressions are used, and mind upon what Occasion they come in, I dare say, they will be convinced, from the Scope and Design of the Discourse, that *David* doth not make these Complaints, with reference to his spiritual

tual Estate, as if God had withdrawn his Grace, or the inward Influences of the Holy Spirit, from his Mind, but wholly with reference to some outward Calamity, some outward Distress, or Affliction, or Persecution, that he, or the Church of God, was then under: But now this is nothing to the Case of these Persons among us that I am at present speaking; it is not of God's forsaking them in this Sense that they complain: Let God exercise them with as many outward Afflictions and Adversities, as he pleaseth, they will bear them as well as they can, and they will not murmur or complain upon Account thereof; but they are afraid that God has forsaken them, as to their spiritual Conditions; that he hath withdrawn from them the inward Influences of his Holy Spirit, and left them to themselves.

But now what little Grounds they have, for such Fears as these, will sufficiently appear, from considering the Nature of this second Sort of Desertion, or God's forsaking Man.

It cannot be denied but that God may, and sometimes doth, forsake Men, by withdrawing from them the inward Assistance of his Grace and Spirit, and this is Desertion properly so called; and a heavy Judgment it is, upon whomsoever it falls: And this I take to be that which *David* so earnestly prays against, in the 51st *Psalms*, after he had so grievously provoked God, and wounded his

The Second Sermon.

own Conscience, by his foul Adultery and Murder; *Cast me not away*, saith he, *from thy Presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me*. God, I say, may, and, it is to be feared, doth sometimes forsake Men, in this Sense: He withdraws from them his Grace, both that preventing, and assisting, and even that restraining Grace, which he had formerly afforded them; and leaves them intirely to themselves, to be filled with their own Ways, and to commit all manner of Sin with Greediness; and thus, for Instance, he forsook *Judas Iscariot*; upon which the Devil enter'd into him. And this State is that which the Scripture expresseth by Darknes of Heart; by Hardness of Heart; by being given up to a reprobate Mind; by being under the Power of strong Delusions, and the like: but then it is to be remember'd,

Deus nunquam deserit nisi deserentem,

As St. *Austen* somewhere speaks; that God never thus forsaketh any Man, that hath not long before forsaken him; God is patient, and long-suffering, and is not easily provoked thus to give up a Man. Long doth he bear with the Ingratitude and Perverseness of his Creatures; and many and various Ways doth he use, to bring them to a Sense of their Sin, and of their Duty. But, if they resist all these Means; if the Goodness of God doth not lead them to Repentance, but, on the contrary,

trary, they despise the Riches of his Grace, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering, and continue obstinate in their evil Courses, and cease not to put Affronts upon the Holy Spirit of God; a Time will come, when this Holy Spirit will no longer stay with them, but He will return to his Place, and leave them to their own Hardness of Heart, and Impenitency, to treasure up Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and the Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God.

It is true, that every Act of wilful Sin, and especially every Habit of such Sin, doth highly grieve the Spirit of God. But yet it is not for every such Act or Habit, that the Spirit doth usually forsake Men. He still continues to knock at the Door of their Hearts, and to pursue them with his holy Motions, so long as there are any Hopes of gaining them to Repentance: But if Men be unpersuadable, and, instead of complying with God's Grace, and reforming their Ways, go on adding Sin to Sin, and growing more audacious and impudent in their Provocations, it is but just with God to abandon such ungrateful Wretches, and totally to leave them to themselves.

But it is to be hoped there are but very few, in comparison, among us, whom God hath thus forsaken. The greatest Part of Men, tho' they are far from being as good as they should, (nay, far from being as good as they must be, if ever they come to Heaven)

The Second Sermon.

yet are not thus forsaken. The Spirit doth still strive with them; and, tho' he doth not dwell with them, (which he doth in none but holy and sanctify'd Persons) yet he often affords them his Presence, and offers them his Assistance; he often puts good Thoughts into them, and gives them many Opportunities of rescuing themselves from the Slavery they are under: If they will make use of that Assistance, and comply with those Motions, and improve those Opportunities as they may do, there is no Doubt in the World but they will be gained to Virtue and Happiness; God hath not forsaken them, and, consequently, there is Hope of them, 'till they be hardened in their Sins, as we read *Pharaoh* was.

If this now be the true Notion of spiritual Desertion, as, without Doubt, it is, we may from hence learn these four Things, which I seriously recommend to the Consideration of all those afflicted Persons amongst us, that I am now concerned with; and I conclude with them.

First of all, That they, of all others, have the least Reason to imagine that they are forsaken of God; for they, of all others, are farthest from that State which I have now represented as the true State of spiritual Desertion: Their Hearts are so far from being obstinately bent to the Pursuit of any evil Course, that they abhor nothing more than the Thoughts of it. They have a most tender Sense of their Duty, would not for the
World

World willingly do any thing that they know is displeasing to God; all their Grief and Trouble is, that they do not please him enough, that they do not perform that chearful, uniform Obedience to his holy Laws, that they desire to do. Doth this now look like the Case of one that is abandoned of God, and left to himself? The Effects of God's forsaking Men, are Hardness of Heart, and Impenitence, and running on in a Course of known Wickedness without any Reluctance or Remorse. No Man that is ever apprehensive of God's forsaking him, that is ever fearful that he should, or troubled that he hath; no such Man, I say, is really forsaken by him. Those that are the least sensible of such a Judgment, are the likeliest to have it inflicted upon them.

Secondly; Those Persons, whose Cases we are representing, as they are not at present forsaken by God, so neither are they in danger of it: For, whatever Apprehensions they may have of themselves, they do not give God Occasion to forsake them, because they do not forsake him. For, I suppose, tho' they complain of great Dulness and Insensibility, and can by no means satisfy themselves in their religious Endeavours and Performances, yet they have really as rooted an Aversion to every Thing that is evil, and have as hearty a Desire, and as steady Resolutions, and use as serious Care to frame their Life and Conversation according to the Laws
of

The Second Sermon.

of God, as ever they had, or did. Now, so long as they continue in this Frame and Disposition of Mind, assuredly God is as much present with them by his Grace, and Holy Spirit, (tho' they do not feel it so much) as ever he was. They partake as much of his Influence and Communications, and do really as much enjoy his Favour, and the Light of his Countenance, in the true Sense of it, as ever they did: And, however cloudy and listless their Minds be; however flat and dry in their Devotions; how little Joy and Comfort soever they find in their Lives; they are certainly as dear to God, (who knoweth their Make, and distinguisheth between the steady Principles of their Minds, and the uncertain Tempers of their Bodies which affect them; I say, they have as much the Favour and Acceptance of God) as when they thought themselves in the most happy Condition: Nay, and they will continue so to have, as long as they continue their Care and Diligence in serving him, and obeying his Laws.

But, Thirdly, when once they begin to grow careless in their Lives, when their good Purposes and Resolutions flag and grow cold, and their Devotions are seldomer, and their Relapses into Sin more frequent, and more grievous, then let them have a Care of themselves, for these are evil Symptoms of a dangerous Fall approaching: They now begin to grieve the Holy Spirit, and to provoke him to withdraw himself; And, if they do
not,

not, by Repentance, recover themselves to their former healthful Constitution of Soul, that Holy Spirit will, by Degrees, withdraw himself. For, in the same Degree that they forsake their Duty, will the Holy Spirit forsake them; as Sin grows stronger in them, so doth the Spirit grow weaker: So that, if they go on in this falling, declining Condition, they will at last lose the In-dwelling of the Spirit, and be reduced to the State of sensual, carnal Men. It doth therefore infinitely concern all those that are at present in a good Condition, to keep up their holy Purposes and Resolutions as much as they can; at no time to slacken their Diligence in the Service of God, how dryly and unsatisfactorily soever they perform it: If their Hearts be sincere, and they do really make it their Business to live as well as they can, no matter what they think of themselves, no matter what Inequality of Temper, what Ebbs and Flows of Affections, they are subject to; all is still right with them: But when they begin to grow negligent and careless in their Endeavours, and to indulge themselves in any vain or sinful Course, then begins their Danger.

But then, Fourthly and lastly, to conclude this Point; If it should be the Unhappiness of these Persons, by their own Carelessness, to lose the inhabiting Presence of the Holy Spirit, which was the Principle of Regeneration, and the New Life in them, so that

that they are now brought back again to the State of worldly, sensual Men; yet, as it appears from what has been said, it is not even yet to be concluded, that they are forsaken of God, or in a State of Desertion truly so call'd; for tho' the Spirit doth not now any longer dwell with them, but has quitted their Souls from being his Temple, his Habitation, (because they have expelled him thence) yet it is to be hoped he hath not quite given them over; as God affords them still many outward Means of Grace and Reconciliation, so he affords them many inward Motions to make those Means effectual to their Recovery: And, tho' their Condition be infinitely more hazardous than it was, and their Repentance more difficult, yet still they may repent and recover. For, as I said before, no Man is forsaken of God, that is not given up to Hardness of Heart; I do not mean such Hardness of Heart as some melancholy People fancy they are troubled with; but I mean, a wretched Stupidity, and Unconcernedness about spiritual Affairs, so that he lives in Sin, and knows that he doth so, and is content with his Condition, and thus continues to live without designing or endeavouring to return to God and his Duty; which certainly is a sad Condition, and *God Almighty deliver us from it, &c.*



SERMON III.

PSAL. XLII. 6, 7.

According to the Translation of our *Liturgy*.

*Why art thou so full of Heaviness, O my Soul?
And why art thou so disquieted within me?
Put thy Trust in God, for I will yet give
him Thanks for the Help of his Countenance.*

I Am now speaking to the Case of those People who are under great Afflictions; upon Account of the Loss of their spiritual Comfort, which they used to feel in the Performance of their religious Exercises, and which they attribute to God's forsaking them, and leaving them to themselves. Time has been, (say they) when they have taken great Delight in the Ways of God, and have experienced the comfortable Influences of his Spirit upon their Minds. They were then full of Life and Vigour, and could meditate, could read, could pray, could receive the Sacrament, with a great deal of Devotion, and a great deal of Satisfaction: But now they find a great Abatement of their Affections towards
God:

The Third Sermon.

God: All their religious Exercises are performed very heavily: They find no manner of Sweetness in them. On the contrary, they are very troublesome to them; their Hearts are like *Pharaoh's* Chariots, either they cannot move at all in the Way of God, or they move with wonderful Difficulty. Is not this a plain Indication, that God hath forsaken them, and withdrawn his Presence and Assistance from them?

This is the Case I am now upon; and in speaking to it, I proposed to do two Things:

First, To give an Account of Desertion truly so call'd, or what it is for God to forsake a Man; and to shew that these People have no Reason in the World to apprehend that they are in that State.

Secondly, To give a true Account of those Effects which melancholy Persons are wont to ascribe to God's forsaking them, and withdrawing his Grace from them: And withal, to offer something both for the Direction and Comfort of Persons that are in this Condition.

The first of these Points I dispatched the last Time. I now proceed to the other; which is, to give an Account of those Effects which melancholy People are wont to ascribe to God's forsaking them, and withdrawing his Grace and Spirit from them; and likewise to offer such Things as may be of Use, in order to their Cure.

The

The first Thing I have to represent, is this: What if all the Abatement of their Affections towards God, all this Dulness and Deadness of Heart in their Devotions, which these good People complain of, do arise purely and solely from the Temper of their Bodies? I must confess, I think it doth so in all these Cases, where the Man hath not brought this Indisposition upon himself, by a wilful Neglect or Disuse of his spiritual Exercises, and giving himself up to a careless, worldly, or sensual Life.

I touched upon this Head, and spoke something about the Influence of the Body upon the Mind, in my last Discourse, where I spoke of religious Melancholy in General: And here my Argument leads me to treat a little more particularly of it. You all know that we consist of two Parts, a Soul, and a Body, which tho' they are distinct Substances, and capable of subsisting separately, the one from the other; yet, while we live in this mortal State, they are, by the wonderful Power of God so closely united, that they do strongly affect one another. Though it be our Minds, or our Spirits, or our Souls, properly, that can be said to think, or to reflect, or to perceive, or to remember, or to hope, or to fear, or to enjoy, and the like; yet all these Operations are influenced by, and do receive a kind of Tincture, as I may say, from that State, and Condition, and Plight that the Body is in. For it is plain by manifold
Experi-

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Experience, that our Souls, in this World, cannot act at all, without the Help and Ministry of the purer Parts of our Bodily Substance; which purer Parts (let them consist in what they will) we call by the Name of animal Spirits. Now as these animal Spirits, which the Soul makes use of as her Instrument in all her intellectual Operations; I say, as these are well or ill-disposed, so will all the Acts of our Minds proceed accordingly: Sometimes, when they are quite stifled and oppress'd, as in a Fit of an Apoplexy, and such-like Distempers, our Minds, how vigorous soever they have been before, cannot think at all, but we are quite without Sense and Perception. Again; At another Time, when their Motion is not quite damp'd, but yet, thro' a Distemper, they move irregularly and tumultuously, as in the Case of a violent Fever; why then, tho' we do think, yet we think wildly, and extravagantly, and inconsistently, even to that Degree, that we call it Deliriousness, or Frenzy. Again; At another time, when the animal Spirits do move regularly, and are a fit Instrument for the Soul to work with; yet, as there is greater or lesser Plenty of them, as they are finer or grosser, as they are more or less agitated; so, accordingly, are the Operations of our Souls more lively, or more dull, performed with more Ease, or with more Difficulty; with greater, or with less Pleasure and Satisfaction to ourselves. We cannot think so freely,

freely, after a full Meal; nor so strongly, after we are tired and dispirited with bodily Labour; nor so attentively, when we are diverted by Pain or outward Objects. Nay, there are some Constitutions so susceptible of Impressions from without, that the very Change of Weather occasions a great Change in the Temper of the Mind; as to its being chearful or melancholy, fit or unfit to think. And this also, as to our Passions; as some Men are inclined more to one Passion, and others to another, so the very same Person shall find the like Difference in himself, being sometimes, for Instance, strongly disposed to Chearfulness and Joy, at other times to unusual Inclinations, to Sadness, and Fear; and Grief. Whence now proceed all these Changes, and various Dispositions, that we feel in ourselves? Certainly, not so much from the Soul; (for the Habits and Dispositions of that are often, for all these Varieties, the very same) but rather, they are, in a great measure, if not wholly, to be attributed to the Variety of Tempers, that the Body is subject to; which the Soul cannot many times either prevent, or alter.

And why may it not be thus in the Business we are now concerned in? Why may we not ascribe all that Inequality we find in our Affections towards God, and spiritual Things, wholly to the Inequality of the Temper of our Bodies? Without doubt, this is generally the Cause of it: When our animal

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Spirits are fine, and pure, and in a convenient Plenty, then, whatever we apply our Minds to, we can go chearfully about it, and vigorously pursue it; and, if then some religious Matter be the Object we employ our Thoughts and Meditation upon, we shall do it very successfully: we shall be able to give a serious Attention to what we are about, and shall have more lively Apprehensions of Things, and these Apprehensions will be accompanied with suitable Affections; so that, if we pray, we shall pray with greater Ardor and Fervency; if we read, or hear, it will be with greater Intensity, and quicker Apprehensions: If we meditate, we shall do it with greater Life and Seriousness; and we shall raise ourselves to an unusual Pitch of Devotion: And a great deal of Joy and Delight will arise in our Souls, from this Briskness and Vigour of their Operations about such excellent Subjects. And if this Activity of our animal Spirits did always last, without doubt, it would be no hard Matter to keep up always this Life and Vigour of our Souls, in the Exercise of Religion, together with the Satisfaction that does attend it. But here is the Misery; these being in a constant Flux, and obnoxious to a thousand Alterations and Depressions, both from outward and inward Causes, nay, being subject to be spent and dissipated by the very employing them, (for there is no Man that thinks warmly, and for a long Time upon any Thing,

Thing, but mightily exhausts his Spirits, and leaves himself after such Intension very flat and languid) I say, this being the Case, how can it be avoided, but that the Soul must sympathize with the Body in all these Alterations and Decays, even as to her spiritual and religious Operations, as well as others? Doth any Man always follow his worldly Affairs, with the same Briskness and Cheerfulness? Can any Man study, or read, or discourse, at all Times, with the same Easiness and Satisfaction to his own Mind? Doth not every ~~Mind~~^{Man} find himself sometimes mightily out of Humour, and dull, and listless, when he should set himself about any of those Things; tho' perhaps he hath a great Mind to it? And, if these Varieties and Inequalities of Temper cannot be prevented in other Things, what Reason has any one to think, that his Endeavours and Performances in Religion should be exempted from them? Why should he imagine, that he should be always able to pray with the same Fervour and Affection, or that he should always take that Delight and Satisfaction in the Exercise of Religion, that he sometimes doth? No, as long as we have these Bodies about us, the best Men must expect these Ebbs and Flows of Affection to the Service of God: And that, even when they are in good Health; and therefore much more, if it should be their Misfortune to have their Animal Spirits depraved by Hypochondriack Indispositions;

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as most of the Persons whose Case we are speaking to, no doubt, have. But, however, though these Things may be their Trouble, yet they are not their Sins, and this may be their Comfort, that, tho' for the present they have lost their former Vigour and Joy, and are quite out of Humour for performing their religious Duties, yet if they will have Patience with themselves, they will in Time recover that good Humour again: Their Vigour and chearful Temper of Mind will return, as the accidental Indispositions wear off from the Body.

But some of these People, who complain of God's forsaking them, may say, that, in what I have hitherto said, I have not reached their Case; that which troubles them is not so much the Flatness and Deadness of their Affections in Devotion, now and then, which all good Men are subject to: but this; they have quite lost those enravishing Joys and Consolations, which they have formerly felt in Communion with God, and which could not be the mere Effect of their own good Temper, and the Briskness of their natural Powers, but were certainly the Communications of God to their Souls. They have heretofore been raised up many Pitches above themselves, and enjoyed such Pleasures and Satisfaction in their Approaches to God, as far exceed all others upon Earth. But now, tho' they cannot say but that they are as careful of their Lives and Actions as they were

were then, and endeavour to serve God as well as they can, yet the Case is much altered with them; they have quite lost those Manifestations of God's Favour, that Light of his Countenance, those Glimpses which were the Support of their Souls, and the Joy of their Lives, and this is that they complain of.

Well, let us consider this in the second Place; and here I would first ask these Persons how they come to know that these rapturous Joys, they speak of, were indeed owing to the Power and Influence of the Holy Ghost upon them? It will bear a just Dispute, whether these overflowing Joys and Comforts, that are sometimes felt upon the Application of our Minds to spiritual Things, be always to be ascribed to the Operation of God's Spirit upon the Mind; or, whether they be not often the mere Effects of a heated Brain, and a raised Imagination; Or rather indeed, the Thing is past Dispute; for it is certain, that, in some Persons, these Effects, even in the highest Degree of them, owe their Production to no higher a Cause than their natural Powers: Witness the Transports of Joy, and the Pleasures, even to Ecstasy, which many Enthusiastical Persons have felt, or at least have given out that they have, in the Exercise of the grossest Superstition of a false Religion; and which many of the same Complexion, have experienced likewise in the true Religion; who, yet, have been Persons of none of the best

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Morals, but, in truth, wholly devoid of the spiritual Life : Now, I say, to attribute these Raptures and Ecstasies of Joy, in such Persons, to the Holy Spirit of God, will be very hard (at least now-a-days, when miraculous Powers are ceased). No, certainly, all spiritual Joy is not the Joy of the Holy Ghost ; a Man may be sometimes so full of Joy, that his Soul is even ready to break its Prison, and yet, for all that, not be a whit the more acted by a Divine Spirit,

But how shall we be able to know, when the Joy and Satisfaction we feel, in the Exercise of Religion, doth arise from the Holy Spirit, and when from our own Tempers. This is a material Question, and thus I answer it : • All those Joys that we can give no good Account of, that arise in our Minds we know not how, or wherefore ; and likewise all those Joys, which, while we feel them, do not make us better, do not more incline us to love God and our Neighbour, do not more dispose us to hate Vice and Impurity, and especially the more spiritual Impurities of Pride, and Self-love, which we may labour under ; I say, all these Joys and Consolations, how high and rapturous soever they be, are justly to be suspected by us, as the pure Results of our own heated Temper. These are the two certain Marks and Characters, whereby we may be able to distinguish the Peace and the Joy, that ariseth from the Holy Spirit, from that that ariseth from

from the Ebullition of our own animal Spirits; namely, First, That the Peace and Joy of the Holy Ghost is always rational; there is some good Ground, some solid Foundation for it in the Mind of the Man that feels it; which Foundation is a good Conscience, a being able to satisfy ourselves, from the Testimony of our own Hearts and Lives, that we are sincere and unfeigned in our Desires and Endeavours to approve ourselves to God, as his faithful Servants. *This (saith St. Paul) is our Rejoicing, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity we have had our Conversation in the World.*

And, Secondly, This Joy of the Holy Spirit is never a barren ineffectual Joy, a Joy that only amuses and pleases us, without making us better; but it strangely excites our Diligence, and quickens our Endeavours in the Service of God; it makes us to hunger and thirst more earnestly after his Righteousness, and puts us upon labouring after a greater Participation of his divine Nature: Above all Things, it opens our Hearts towards our Brethren, and spurs us on most powerfully to do all the Good we can in the World.

This is the Nature, and these are the Qualities, of that Joy, which the Spirit of God worketh in the Heart of Believers; and, if that which we sometimes feel, in the Exercise of Devotion, and at the Loss of which we complain, be not of this Nature, and have

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not these Qualities; let it be, otherwise, never so affecting and transporting, we cannot be assured that it is from God; nay, rather, we have Reason to conclude, that it is the Effect of our own Temper, and natural Powers.

But now, having said this by way of Caution, that we may not take every pleasing Effort of an heated Fancy, for the Manifestation of God's Presence, and Favour to the Souls of Men; we will admit, that that Joy, and those Pleasures, at the Loss of which these Persons complain, were really what they take them to be; namely, the Effect of God's Spirit working upon their Hearts; for I do not know, but that God's Spirit may, and often doth, influence the Minds of good Men, in such a Way as this: But then this we say, in the second Place, that the withdrawing those Joys and sensible Satisfaction from their Minds, is no Argument in the World of God's Displeasure against them, much less, of his forsaking them, and leaving them to themselves. For it is to be considered, that the Persons, to whom God most frequently vouchsafes these extraordinary Smitings, are usually young Beginners in Religion; such as are but newly enter'd upon a serious devout Life, and, consequently, must be supposed to have many Difficulties to struggle with, and many Sins to mortify. Now, to Persons that are in these Circumstances, it is but reasonable to think, that

that God may, now and then, for their Encouragement, give some extraordinary Tastes of the Pleasures that are to be had in Religion, and the Enjoyment of his Favour, which he doth not often afford to more grown Christians. As they are in the weakest and most imperfect Condition, so the Hardship and Difficulty they have to undergo in Religion are then the greatest; so that they have real need of those extraordinary Supports; those delicious Relishes of God upon their Minds are necessary, for the turning the Balance against the Allurements of Sin, which do strongly press the Affections the other Way; they would not be able to resist the Temptations that daily come in their Way, were they not thus borne up, by a most feeling Sense of the Pleasures of Religion. This now being the Case, what Reason has any good Christian to be troubled or discontented at the Loss of those sensible transporting Joys, which he hath sometimes experienced in the Ways of God? Ought he from hence to conclude, that God loves him less than he did, because he hath withdrawn those Comforts from him? No, not in the least; he ought rather to conclude this, that, if he still stood in need of them, God would have still continued them; but, that he is now grown stronger, and advanced to such a Pitch of Christianity, that he needs them not. God now looks upon him no longer as a Child, but as a Man; and therefore doth no longer feed

feed him with Milk, but with stronger Meat. — Would it not be very unreasonable, that, because a Parent useth his Child more tenderly, and takes more Pains about him, when he is sick and weakly, than when he is in Health, and able to shift for himself; for one, therefore, to conclude, that that Parent loved his Child better then, when he was not able to look to himself, than he doth now that he is? Or was it not a very perverse Reasoning of the elder Son in the Parable, that, because upon the Return of his hungry starved Brother, the Prodigal, the Father ordered the fatted Calf to be killed, and made him a Feast; whereas he had not treated him, the elder Son, with such Expressions of Kindness for many Years before? I say, was it not a perverse Reasoning in him, therefore to conclude, that the prodigal disobedient Son was more dear to his Father than he, that had served him many Years, and had never displeased him? Just the same Perverseness is it, to argue thus: That, because God doth not feast us continually with these spiritual Delicacies, with which he formerly entertained us, or now entertains Penitents or new Converts, that, therefore, he hath withdrawn his Favour from us, or is displeased at us. No, let us assure ourselves, God's Care over us is the same that it was then, and we shall want nothing, that is needful for us; for all that he hath is ours, as the Father there told his elder Son: And, if he hath
now

now taken away those luscious Joys, which heretofore accompanied our religious Endeavours, yet it is not out of any Unkindness to us. Something he saw, that we did not; which made it highly reasonable and expedient for us, that he should thus deal with us. Either they were not proper for our State, or we should be apt to surfeit of them, and put them to a bad Use. They might prove the Incentives of Pride, and Contempt of others. They might hinder the Purity and Sincerity of our Love to God: Or they might make us careless or negligent in our Pursuit after the most useful and manly Virtues; and, for these Causes, God in pure Compassion and Tenderness to us, deprived us of them.

But, when a Time comes, that it will be reasonable and fit we should have them again; as for Instance, when we are called out to some unusual Trial, or are exposed to some imminent Danger or Temptation, where our Faith and Virtue will need these extraordinary Supports: In this Case, we need not doubt, but God will restore them to us with Advantage. Thus usually God strengthens Martyrs and dying Christians, giving them such a Sense of his Favours, and so invigorating their Minds, that the greatest Dangers, and the most painful Death, cannot discompose them; and thus, without doubt, he will shew himself to every honest Heart, in every Emergency, where there is need of such a Manifestation of his Presence: For
God

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God is faithful, and will never suffer any of his Servants to be tempted above what they are able ; but will with the Temptation make a Way to escape out of it, that they may be able to bear it.

But, Thirdly, Another Thing that deserves seriously to be considered by these Persons whose Case I am speaking to, is this : That that Vigour and Life, and those sensible Pleasures and Comforts, which they were wont to experience in holy Duties, and of the Loss of which they complain, did not, in the least, recommend them more to God whilst they enjoyed them : Tho' they did much tend to the sweetening their Duty, and rendering the Performance of it more satisfactory to themselves ; yet did they not, in the least, render it more acceptable to God ; for, neither did they serve God really better, while they were full of these Comforts, nor do they serve him worse, now that they are without them : Always supposing, they continue their Endeavours, and do not flag in their Resolutions of living a holy Life. Nay, so far are their Duties from being less acceptable to God upon this Account, that they are not accompanied with such Sprightliness of Affections, and Overflowings of Joy, as they were wont, but are performed droopingly and heavily ; that, on the contrary, I scruple not to say, they are a great deal more. He that finds no Pleasure and Delight in the Ways of God, and yet, notwithstanding, doth still

still walk in them, and continues resolved so to do, in spite of all Discouragements he meets with, doth certainly express a greater Virtue, and shews a truer Love to God, and consequently is better accepted by him, than if he had I know not what Spurs of sensible Delight to prick him forwards. He that, when his Mind is dull and heavy, and he cannot raise up his Affections so nimbly towards God, yet still makes a Conscience of saying his Prayers, and prays as heartily as he can, tho' not so delightfully as he would, nor so passionately as he was won't; I say, such Prayers, as they proceed from a purer Sense of his Duty, so, without doubt, they will be more effectual with God, for the obtaining what he really stands in need of, than if they were accompanied even with ecstasical Transports of Fervour and Joy.

God measures our Services by the inward Sincerity of the Heart, and the Honesty of the Mind, with which they are tender'd; and not by the Fluttering of the sensible Passions, that go along with them, or the extrinsical Supports, which, in our Esteem, do give them Advantage. He that is in Love with his Duty, only so long as he receives great Joy and Satisfaction in it, or from it, shews (as some of our Divines use to express it) that he loves Christ Jesus, more for the Loaves he used to bestow upon him, than for his own Goodness and Excellence. We then truly serve God, when we chearfully obey him

him for Conscience-sake: But, whether that Obedience be delightful or troublesome, pleasing or displeasing to ourselves, hath no other Place in the Esteem or Acceptance of God, save only this, that the greater the Difficulties and Discouragements are that we lie under, the more valuable are our Services to him, and the more highly shall they be rewarded.

Lift up thy Head therefore; O drooping Soul! Be not dejected, that thy former Joys have forsaken thee; that the Light, that hath sometimes shined into thy Mind, is intercepted by thick Clouds that encompass thee; and that, instead of the green and pleasant Pastures in which thy Way hath hitherto lain, thou art come into a barren and dry Wilderness: Think not that this Change was meant thee, for any Hurt, but rather for thy exceeding Good. • Thou hast now an Opportunity put into thy Hands, of shewing the Sincerity of thy Affections to God, of expressing thy Courage and Resolution in his Service: If, notwithstanding these Discouragements, thou pursuest thy Course, and dost not treacherously fall back, assure thyself, tho' thou dost not serve God so much to thy own Satisfaction, as thou wast wont, yet thy Service is much better; and he is more delighted to see thee follow him in these rugged Paths, and under these Discouragements, than when thy Way was most pleasant and smooth, and thou wast carried
on

on with the briskest Gales of Affection and Joy.

But, Fourthly and Lastly, to conclude : If these Persons, whose Case I am speaking to, do really desire to find a perfect Cure of those Grievances they groan under ; the best Advice (as may appear from all that has been said) that can be given them, is, not to desire nor covet these sensible Joys and Smitings in Religion : But, on the contrary, to bring themselves, if it be possible, to such a State of Mind, that they can live contentedly and comfortably without them. We have seen what an Influence the Temper of our Bodies most commonly hath, in the producing these kinds of Effects ; which Temper we cannot, with our utmost Care, preserve always in a stable uniform Tenor : We have seen likewise, that what God is pleased sometimes, in an extraordinary Way, to contribute to these Effects by his Spirit, is not always to be expected, because the Thing is often unreasonable, and no way fitting to be done. If therefore the Comfort and Happiness of our Lives depend upon having these Joys and Smitings, it is certain it will never be constant, but we shall be as often in a miserable dejected Condition, as we are in a comfortable and happy one. What then must we do ? Why, let us not value those Things ; let us not hanker after them, but seek our Happiness and Comfort from something else, something that is built upon a more solid Foundation, something

thing upon which our bodily Temper hath not so much Influence; which, when all is done, must be the rational Evidence, that we are able to give ourselves, that we do sincerely endeavour to please God, in those Ways that he hath taught us by Jesus Christ his Son. The more our Religion mingles with our Passions, or depends upon them, the more uncertain and suspected will it be always rendered unto us.

Let us therefore labour to get ourselves into a higher Dispensation; Let us spiritualize our Religion, as much as we can, and make it a reasonable Service: Let us draw it off, as much as is possible, from the lower sensitive Soul, (where the Affections and Passions are) where it is too often seated, and fix it in our Minds and Spirits: When it has once taken Root there, it will not fail to bring forth the Fruits of constant Peace, and (whatever becomes of the sensible Satisfaction) will perpetually replenish our Hearts with Comfort.

Would you always be in a calm serene State of Mind? Learn to love God heartily: Possess your Minds with a deep Sense of his Love and Goodness; of his Presence and Providence; of the Reasonableness of his Precepts; and the Certainty of the Rewards he hath promised in another World. Upon these Considerations, devote your whole Man to his Service, resign up yourselves intirely to his Government. Let it be the constant
Desire

Desire of your Souls, and the Endeavour of your Lives, to do his Will; and to submit to it, whatever it be. Do but heartily recommend yourselves to him, for his Grace and Holy Spirit, to enable you to do your Duty, and to preserve you in it; and leave all the rest of your Concernments, both outward and inward, wholly to his Disposal. This now is a Religion truly spiritual and rational, and a Life thus led will be a perpetual Spring of uninterrupted Peace to your Minds; such a Peace as ordinarily no Irregularity of Temper, no Flatness and Dulness of Affections, that may at some time seize you, no inward Indisposition, nor outward Event, will be able to discompose. Nothing can rob you of it, but what robs you either of your Virtue or of your Wits and Reason. For this is the rational Peace of a pure Conscience, which the Inequalities of the sensitive Nature can no ways affect, so long as the Head of the Man is not disordered.

It is true, this Peace is still and quiet, it is not so violent, and boisterous, and transporting as those Flashes of Joy, which young Converts now and then feel; or those sensible Smitings of Devotion, that arise from heated and raised Affections: But yet, it is a great deal more true and solid, it is more sincere and unmingled, it is more constant and regular, it gives a better-grounded Assurance to those that have it, of the Goodness of their Condition; and lastly, it is a Peace that will never

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leave them, so long as they do not leave God, and their Duty: Nay, the longer they live, (provided still their Judgment continues sound) the more it will grow and increase, the greater Consolations will they have in the Service of God, and the greater Assurance that they are in his Favour. And, the nearer they approach to Death, the more delightful Prospect will they have of the happy Place where they are going. And, when they come to die, (where others stand fearful and trembling at the Brink) they will with great Calmness and Assurance, resign up their Souls to God, being able to pronounce to themselves with *St. Paul, I have fought a good Fight, I have finished my Course, I have kept the Faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord of righteous Judgment will give me at that Day.*

This Peace, this intellectual Peace, is that which we are to labour after, if ever we would live happy Lives indeed; and as widely different it is, from those transporting boisterous Pleasures of Religion, (of the Loss of which the Persons I am speaking of do complain) as the kindly Warmth of the Sun is from the Scorching of Lightning; or, as the pure calm Regions above are from this various and disturbed Air we breathe in.

In a Word, This solid Peace of Conscience is the true Joy of the Holy Ghost, the Fruit of the Spirit dwelling within us, in the Sense
of

of which we shall be able to practise, without Interruption, those excellent Precepts of the Apostle, which seem to be the Top of Christian Morals. *Be careful for nothing, but in every Thing give Thanks : Count it all Joy when ye enter into divers Temptations: Rejoice evermore, and again I say, Rejoice.*

And thus much on the first Case I proposed to speak to; the other, about the Devil's Temptations, and blasphemous Thoughts, I shall defer to the next Time.





S E R M O N IV.

2 C O R. II. II.

*Lest Satan should get an Advantage of us ; for
we are not ignorant of his Devices.*



AFTER a general Account of that which we call religious Melancholy, I came to speak to two of the most usual Cases of those, that are afflicted with it. The First was the Case of those, that are in the State of Desertion, as it is commonly called ; that is, those who have lost all the Sweetness and Comfort they used to find in the Ways of Religion, and the Exercise of Piety ; and thereupon, think that God hath withdrawn his Grace and Spirit from them. And this I have already spoken to.

The other is the Case of those, that think themselves given up to the Power of the Devil, upon Account of the Multitude of wicked blasphemous Thoughts, and Fancies, which do continually haunt their Minds, do what they can to the Contrary. And this I now
come

come to speak to; and for that Purpose, I have chosen for my Text these Words of St. Paul, *Lest Satan should get an Advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his Devices.*

Which Words will afford us a fair Handle, both for the discoursing this Case, and also some other Points relating to the Temptations of the Devil, which it may be of Use to us to be well informed about.

I do not mean to spend Time, in giving an Account of the particular Occasions upon which St. Paul spoke these Words, (which was that of the incestuous *Corinthian*) nor to inquire what those particular Advantages were, that he intimates Satan would get over the *Corinthians*, if they did not follow the Advice that he here gives them; which was to restore that excommunicated incestuous Brother to the Peace of the Church, upon his Repentance. It is sufficient for my Business, to observe, what is plainly intimated in these Words of his, namely, the Readiness of the Devil to take all Advantages of us, for the drawing us from our Duty, and the Art and Stratagems he makes Use of, for that Purpose; or, if you will, thus; that the Devil is always very busy in tempting Men to sin.

This is the Point, that now comes under our Consideration from this Text. There is hardly any Doctrine of Religion, about which Men have more different Notions and Apprehensions,

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prehenſions, than this of the Devil's tempting Mankind. Some of us do not believe enough of it; others are apt to believe too much (as particularly thoſe Perſons I before mentioned.) Now, for the rectifying the Miſtakes both on the one Hand and on the other, and the putting this Matter into as clear a Light as I can, I propoſe theſe following Points, as the Heads of my Diſcourſe upon this Argument, which will indeed take in moſt of the Difficulties that occur in it. That is to ſay,

Fiſt, To inquire what is meant by the Devil or Satan, as he is here called in the Text.

Secondly, Whether the Devil hath ordinarily a Power to tempt Men, eſpecially us Chriſtians.

Thirdly, Whether all our Temptations to Sin do ariſe from the Devil, or are to be aſcribed to him.

Fourthly, Whether the Devil hath a Power to tempt all Men alike, or the ſame Perſon alike at all Times.

Fifthly, Whether we can diſtinguiſh the Devil's Temptations, from the evil Suggeſtions that ariſe in our own Minds from other Cauſes.

Sixthly, What we are to ſay of thoſe wicked blaſphemous Thoughts, and other troubleſome Fancies, that are often injected into the Minds of melancholy People, and which are uſually thought and called the Devil's Temptations in a moſt proper Senſe;
and

and what is the most proper Advice to be given in that Case.

Of these in their Order, as far as the Time will give me Leave.

I. The first Inquiry is, Who we are to understand by the Devil.

This Question ought I think a little to be spoken to, if it was upon no other Account than that extravagant Opinion that some among us have taken up about this Matter. According to them, the Devil that is so often spoken of in the Scriptures, is nothing else but either a Disease of the Body, or a Phantasm in the Brain, or the wicked Principles and Inclinations of a Man's Heart. This is the Doctrine of Mr. *Hobbs* and his Followers.

But there cannot a vainer Conceit enter into a Man's Head than this is. By the very same Logick that they can prove this, they may likewise prove, that all those Men that are spoken of in the Old and New Testament, were not real Persons, but Qualities. For it is certain, that the Devil is in the Scripture as much represented as a Person, a real subsisting Being, distinct from God and from good Angels, and from Mankind; I say, he is as plainly thus represented, as any Man or Woman, that is there mentioned, is. And he, for Instance, that will say, that when our Saviour was tempted by the Devil in the Wilderness, all this was but a Transaction of his Imagination, and that it was only his own

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Fancy that presented to his Eyes all the Kingdoms of the World, and that it was only his own Fancy that set him upon a Pinnacle of the Temple, and would have had him fallen down and worshipped it; I say, he that would give such an Account as this, of that Matter, may with the same Reason say, that Jesus himself was but a Phantasm, an Imagination, and that there was never such a real Person in the World.

The Devil then has a real Being of his own, independent of us, or any other Creature: And that Being is of the spiritual or angelical Nature. As there are good Spirits, and good Angels, so there are evil Spirits, and evil Angels; and of this latter Sort is the Devil.

But then, *Secondly*, When we are speaking of the Devil, we are not to understand any one particular Being, or any one particular evil Spirit, but the whole Aggregate, or Company of evil Spirits, which inhabit round about us in the lower Regions of the Air. All these are in the Scripture Language, and in common Speech, called by the Name of the Devil, and sometimes in the plural Number, by the Name of Devils.

For the understanding this, we are to know, that, among that infinite and innumerable Company of Angels, which God created in a happy and glorious Condition, all of them did not continue in that primitive Happiness: But several of them, by their wilful Apostasy

stasy from God, forfeited that Dignity and Glory they were possessed of, and so depraved their Natures, that they were incapable of dwelling any longer where they did before: But were, by the just Vengeance of God, cast down into these lower Regions of the Air, where they are reserved by Providence, to the Judgment and Punishment of the great Day.

This is the plain Account that the Scriptures give us as to this Matter. Thus St. *Jude* in the 6th Verse of his Epistle: *The Angels, saith he, that kept not their first Estate, but left their own Habitations, them hath God reserved in everlasting Chains under Darknes, unto the Judgment of the great Day.* And just to the same Purpose, and almost in the same Words, doth St. *Peter* speak in the 2d Chapter of his 2d Epistle, Verse the 4th.

These fallen Angels now thus thrust down from Heaven, tho' they do yet in a great Measure retain all the intellectual Accomplishments of the Angelical Nature, such as Reason, and Memory, and Knowledge, yet are they in their moral Qualities quite contrary to all the good Angels; and particularly as to this, that as the good Angels are infinitely kind and benign, great Lovers of God and of Mankind, and most intirely disposed to do all good Offices to them whatsoever; so the Nature of those fallen Angels is cruel and revengefull, full of Hatred, and Spite, and Malice to
God,

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God, and to his whole Creation; and upon Account of this, the Scripture hath given to them the Name of Satan or Devil, which two Words (as all that understand the learned Languages know) signify neither more nor less than an Adversary, or an Accuser, or Calumniator. The one being the *Hebrew* Word for it, and the other the *Greek* Word. And indeed it is, with reference to this Enmity to Mankind, that most of these Names and Characters that they bear in Scripture, are bestowed upon them. Upon this Account it is, that the Devil is called a Murderer, a Deceiver, a Lyar, and the Father of Lyes, the Destroyer, the old Serpent, the great Dragon, with sundry other such Appellations. But then, tho' these Names being put in the singular Number, seem to denote some single evil Spirit, that bears ill Will to Mankind; yet we are always to remember, that they are to be expounded collectively, that is to say, to signify the whole Body of these apostate Spirits, of which there are a vast Number: I say, the whole Body of them; for that these lapsed Angels are formed into a Body politick, or Government, or Kingdom, is plainly enough intimated in the New Testament: For there we meet with the Kingdom of Darknes, in Opposition to the Kingdom of Light; and there we meet with the Prince of the Devils as the Chief of them; who is likewise by *St. Paul* called, *The God of this World, and the Prince*
of

of the Power of the Air. Under whom also, as in other Societies, there are many subordinate Officers, as *St. Paul* seems to intimate in the 6th of the *Ephesians*; where, among the wicked Spirits in heavenly Places (that is, in the *Air*, as *Grotius*, with the Antients, rightly expounds it) that he saith we wrestle against, he makes mention in the plural Number of Principalities and Powers, and other Rulers of the Darknes of this World.

This is the Scripture Account of these Matters. I must confess, it may seem a very odd Thing to some, that there should be in the World a Society of such Spirits, as are confessedly endowed with all the Knowledge and Subtilty of the Angelical Nature, and yet are so horribly degenerated in their Morals, as to take Pleasure in every thing that is naught, and even in ruining Mankind, if they could. But that it is really possible that there should be such Beings, doth in some measure appear from the prodigious Instances of the Depravation of reasonable Natures, that we sometimes see among ourselves, there being Men of excellent Parts and Endowments to be found, that do sometimes so far degenerate from human Kind, that for all manner of Wickedness and Malice, they may be rather called Devils than Men. But that it is more than possible, that there are a Race of such Spirits, as do malign the Welfare of Mankind, and take Pleasure in making Fools, and Wretches, and Slaves of them, is

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too evident, both from all the Histories of past Ages, and from the sad Experience of some Nations at this Day; who (if we may credit the Histories that are writ of them) do miserably groan under the Violences and Tyranny of the Devil. But, however, no one that acknowledgeth the Truth of the Scripture, can possibly doubt of this; for what I have now delivered, is so plainly affirmed in the Old and New Testament, that there is no evading of it. And indeed, this Hypothesis of the Being of Evil Spirits, and their Ill-will to Mankind, and their concerning themselves continually to do us Mischief, is so interwoven with, and makes so considerable a Part of the Scheme of our Religion, as it is delivered by Christ and his Apostles, that we cannot deny the one, without much weakening, if not altogether overthrowing the other.

We take it then for granted, that there are abundance of evil Spirits about us, which we call the Devils, who are inclinable enough to do us Mischief, by drawing us into Sin. But here comes the second Question, Whether the Devil has ordinarily a Power to tempt and seduce Men at this Day, especially us Christians.

This is our second general Head of Inquiry; and in Answer to it, I lay down these several Propositions. *First* of all; It is certain the Devil hath no Power to do any Mischief to any Person or Persons, no, nor in the least to
come

come near them, or to tempt or solicit them to do Evil, any farther than God gives him leave. Tho' there are a great Number of evil Spirits about us, yet it is not to be doubted but the Armies of the living God, the holy Angels that are the Ministers of his Providence for the Good of Mankind, are as near us, and are far greater both in Number and Strength, than the others are; nor can any evil Spirit have Access to us, without their Permission. This is acknowledged by the Devil himself, in the Case of *Job*; nor doth any Man call it in Question, that doth believe God to be the Governor of the World.

Secondly, It is also granted, that the Devil had a greater Power in the World, before our Saviour's coming, than he has had since. Before that Time he had a kind of Empire in the World, and therefore it is that he is called by *St. Paul*, *The God of this World*. For in a manner, all Mankind were in a Degree of Subjection to him (the *Jews* only excepted); and he did not only tempt them to evil Actions, but did in a great measure govern them as to the Affairs of their Religion, seducing them from the Worship of the true God, to the Worship of himself. And as it was thus with the Heathens before our Saviour's Time, so it is at this Day, in many Places of the World, where the Gospel of Christ is not received, if we may believe the Relations concerning them. But upon
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the Preaching of the Christian Religion he was thrown out of his Possession, his Oracles were silenced, and those that were his Slaves before, were asserted into the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God. And this was it which our Saviour told his Apostles, speaking of what will follow upon their Preaching: *I saw (saith he) the Devil fall from Heaven like Lightning, Luke x. 18.*

Thirdly, Tho' upon our Saviour's coming, the Devil's Empire was much diminished, nay, and where-ever Christianity was entertained, it was destroyed; yet notwithstanding that, his Power of tempting did still remain; and, which is very considerable, he had at that Time when the Christian Religion first appeared in the World, a Power allowed him of tempting Christians, one way more or greater than he hath ordinarily had since. The Devil's Temptations are of two Sorts; he solicits and draws Men to Sin, either by the way of Discouragement, and Affrightment and Terror, or by the way of Allurements, and pleasing Insinuations. Now in the former of these Ways, he was permitted to lay most strong Temptations before all the first Christians; for he raised up the severest Persecutions against them that ever were heard of, engaging all the Powers of the World on his side, to suppress, if it was possible, the farther Growth of Christianity. And thus it was reasonable to think he would do; for, as the Apostle expresth it, he had
great

great Wrath, as knowing or suspecting that his Time was short.

This was the great Struggle between the Kingdom of Light, and the Kingdom of Darkneſs. The Devil's Empire was at ſtake, and he knew he muſt loſe it in all Places, where the Faith of Chriſt prevailed; and therefore he did the more vigorously exert all his Power to baffle and ſtifle it.

And as it was reaſonable to think the Devil would do thus, ſo it was reaſonable to believe, that God would ſuffer him to raiſe theſe Temptations. By them, Chriſt's Triumph over the Kingdom of Darkneſs was rendered more illuſtrious; and thoſe very Methods which the Devil made uſe of for the extirpating Chriſtianity, proved the moſt effectual Means for the ſpreading and propagating it thro' the World. But in the mean Time, I muſt needs ſay, that I believe it was of this Kind of Temptations that the Writers of the New Teſtament do ſpeak, when they tell us of grievous Temptations, and of the fiery Trials, and of the fiery Darts of the Devil. It was to this Kind of Oppoſition that the Apoſtle refers, when he tells the Chriſtians, *That they wreſtled not againſt Fleſh and Blood, but againſt Principa-
lities and Powers, and the Rulers of the
Darkneſs of this World*: It was chiefly with reſpect to theſe Storms of Perſecution, which the Devil brought upon the firſt Chriſtians, that St. Paul ſtiles him *a roaring Lion, that
went*

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went about, seeking whom he might devour.

I say, many of these Passages which speak of the Terribleness and Violence of the Devil's Temptations, seem to have respect chiefly to these first Times, when Christ and the Devil strove together for the Victory; and all the Powers of Hell set themselves to make one vigorous Effort, against the prevailing of the Gospel in the World.

But, *Fourthly*, to come home to the Point in Question; tho' the Devil in the first Times of Christianity, had great Power given him to tempt the Disciples of Christ, especially in the way of Terror and Affrightment, than he hath ordinarily had since; yet so far as we can gather from the Scripture, he hath even yet, at this Day, a Power to tempt both ways, and doth frequently do so. Our Saviour hath not yet so subdued all his Enemies under his Feet, but that there are Enemies left: And these Enemies, tho' they cannot do us so much Mischief as they would, or as they once could, yet will they do us what Mischief they can, and assuredly they do lay Snares and Temptations before us to that end.

But how do we prove this? How can we shew, that the Devil hath any thing to do with any Christian Professor now-a-days? To this I answer, How can it be proved, that Christians are at this Day, exempted from the Devil's Temptations? If there be no
 Promise

Promise made to us of that Kind, we will be bold to conclude, that we still are obnoxious to them : Because there are such Things said by our Lord, and his Apostles, of the Devil's Temptations, as will extend to Christians in all Ages, unless they can plead a particular Exemption from them.

Our Saviour, in the 13th of *Matt.* Ver. 19. tells us, that when any one heareth the Words of the Gospel, and understandeth it not, (that is, does not consider and meditate upon it) then cometh the wicked One, or, as *St. Mark* has it, then cometh Satan, and catcheth away the Seed that was sown in his Heart. And this (saith he) is he that receiveth the Seed by the High-way. If now it be the Devil's Property to put the Thoughts of God's Word out of Mens Heads, and to hinder them from taking up good Resolutions thereupon, why should we not imagine that he is as busy with us now, as he was in old Time? Since we see the Effects of this his Working are as great, as ever they were. Again, our Saviour, in the same Chapter, giveth us the same Doctrine in another Parable ; he is representing the State of his Kingdom, how it should be from the Beginning of it, to the End of the World. And he doth it very aptly, by resembling his Church to a Field, wherein the Lord or Owner of it sowed good Seed, but an Enemy sowed Tares ; and both grew up, and no Separation was made of them till Harvest ; but

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then the Reapers, by Order of their Lord, gathered the Corn into the Granary, and the Tares they burnt. What is the Application of this Parable? Why our Saviour tells us directly in the 37th Verse, that he that sowed the good Seed was the Son of Man, that is, our Lord Jesus himself. The good Seed were the right and faithful Professors of the Gospel: The Tares were all wicked Men that professed it: The Enemy that sowed them, was the Devil: The Harvest was the End of the World, and the Reapers were the Angels. This now certainly we may gather from this Parable, that so long as there are wicked ungodly Professors in the World (and there will be always till the Harvest, till the End of the World) so long the Devil doth sow Tares, that is to say, so long he hath a Hand in making Men bad, and drawing them from the true Spirit and Genius of Christianity. There are several other Texts of Scripture I might quote about this Matter; the Reason of which seems to concern all Christians to the End of the World, as particularly *James iv. 7.* where the Apostle, exhorting all Christians against intemperate Anger, and Envy, and Rage, gives them this Advice; *Resist (saith he) the Devil, and he will fly from you.* To this let me add the 4th of the *Ephes. 26, 27.* There saith the Apostle, *Be ye angry, and sin not; let not the Sun go down upon your Wrath, neither give place to the Devil.* These two Texts do plainly shew, that the Devil

Devil has oftentimes a Hand in the tempting Men to Anger, and Wrath, and Envy, and such other uncharitable Works, and that by resisting the Temptations, to them, we do resist the Devil; by not yielding to them, we do not give place to the Devil. It is true, as I said, that the Sins of Wrath, and Envy, and Malice, and the like, are the proper Characters of the Devil's Nature, and it is probable, that he is most busy in tempting to them. But yet, if he tempt to them, it is with great Reason to be presumed that he tempts to other Sins likewise, since they help forward his Interests, and the Hurt of Mankind, tho' in another Way. And thus we see the Temptations to Lust are by St. Paul ascribed to the Devil, *That Satan* (saith he) *tempt you not for your Incontinency*, 1 Cor. vii. 5.

But to put this Matter out of Doubt, that Christians always were, and always shall be exposed to the Devil's Temptations, appears very plain, from the Prayer which Christ left with his Church, to be used by us to the End of the World; I mean the Lord's Prayer, the Conclusion of which is, *Lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from the evil One*, *ὁ καὶ πονηρὸς*, *the evil One*, I say right, wicked One. If now we at this Day, were in no Danger from the Devil, what need is there, nay, rather how absurd would it be for us, every Day to pray to be delivered from him? For that by the evil One,

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is principally meant the Devil, there can be no Doubt.

To conclude this Point, we Christians seem to be in the same Condition with the *Israelites*, after they came out of *Egypt* into the Land of *Canaan*; as they at their Entry into that Land had all the Power of the *Canaanites* set against them, to hinder them from the Conquest of it, and even after they were settled there, God still left some of the *Canaanites* in the Land, nay, and saith he always would do so, that he might prove the *Israelites*, whether they would keep the Way of the Lord to walk therein; so it is with us Christians; tho' our Saviour hath broken the Head of the old Serpent, hath cutted him out of his Kingdom, by settling his Religion amongst us, yet there is so much Power left to him, as that he is still in a Condition to disturb us, and by himself, and his Ministers, to lay Snares in our Way: And all this, as God said to the *Israelites*, that God may prove us, whether we will keep the Way of the Lord to walk therein; *Therefore hath the Lord left these evil Angels, without driving them out hastily, neither hath he delivered them into our Hand.* As I may apply the Words, *Judg. ii. 22, 23.*

But then, Fifthly and Lastly, we are always to remember this, that tho' God do suffer the Devil to tempt us, yet he never gives him leave to do more than tempt us. The Devil cannot force us to do that which is evil. He hath no more Power over us, than our vicious Acquaint-

Acquaintance have, that we converse with. They can, and they do, propose Objects, and Occasions, and Opportunities, by which we are oftentimes tempted to depart from our Duty, and to do something that we ought not to do. And they likewise can, and do apply these Temptations so vigorously by their Persuasions and Counsels, and a thousand sly Suggestions and Insinuations, that we shall be in very great Danger, if we do not watch carefully over ourselves, to be overcome by them.

Thus much the Men of the World daily do, and the Devil doth no more; nor can he do more, when he sets himself most vigorously to do us Mischief. He can present Objects, or raise Phantasms in our Minds about them, he can move and invite, and allure, and solicit. But this is all he can do; he cannot in the least, compel us to depart one Step out of that Way which we have proposed to ourselves, unless we ourselves have a Mind. He may put a fairer Gloss upon a Temptation than it would otherwise have appeared in to us; and he may, it is likely, suggest such Motives to us to comply with it, as would not perhaps have come into our Heads, had he not been about us. But still we are left to our own Choice and Liberty, whether we will comply or not; still we are Masters of ourselves, and may order our own Actions as we please; and if it should happen at any Time, that the Tempter

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should put us hard to it, and lay such Snares before us, as, considering our natural Weakness and Frailties, we should scarcely avoid falling into; why then, is the Spirit of Christ, and the heavenly Host of Angels that attend him, ready at Hand to succour and assist us, and to fortify our Minds with such Strength and Power, as that we shall not be overcome, unless we be Traitors to God and ourselves. *For greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the World*; as the Apostle hath told us.

So that, after all, as Things are contrived, the meanest and the weakest of us is able to match all the Powers of Hell. And they cannot do us the least Mischief, any farther than we ourselves contribute to it. Nay, so far are they from being able to do us Mischief, that there is not any Temptation they present to us, but it is in our Power, thro' Christ's Assistance, to turn it to our great Benefit and Advantage: As God has thought fit to leave us exposed to the Devil's Attempts, for the Exercise of our Virtue, so he hath taken Care to order Matters in such a Way, that we may always do ourselves Good, and improve both our Virtue and Rewards, by the Assaults of the Devil, tho' he can do us no Harm by them.

And thus much of the Second Head of Inquiry: I now proceed to the Third, and that is this; Whether all Temptations to Sin, or all Sins we fall into by Temptation, are to be ascribed to the Devil. This Question I put, because many among us are so ready, at every
Turn

Turn, to charge their Miscarriages upon him, and to remove the Blame from themselves; but how unreasonable this is, will appear by what I shall briefly represent in an Answer to this Inquiry, and therewith I shall conclude.

First of all, it cannot be denied, that in a remote Sense, and with respect to the Original of Sin, the Devil may be said to be the Author and the Cause of all the Sins of Mankind; since it was he that first drew our first Parents from the State of their Innocency, and by their Fall, brought Sin into the World. Accordingly, in the Scripture-Language, *All Sins and Impieties, of what Kind soever, are the Works of the Devil, and all those who do commit Sin, are said to be of the Devil, who was a Sinner from the Beginning.* Secondly, There is likewise no Doubt, but that the Devil is at all Times busy and active for the promoting Sin in the World, as he hath Opportunity; he goes to and fro in the Earth, (as he speaks of himself in the First Chapter of *Job*) observing how his Work goes forwards, and very industrious without Doubt he is, in helping forwards the Interest of his Kingdom. And where-ever he sees that there is Need of his immediate particular Application or Assistance, for the carrying on a Business, there, to be sure, he is ready to afford it, if God gives him Permission.

But then, in the Third Place, if we speak with reference to all the particular Temptations which are presented to a Man, or all the particular Sins which a Man falls into by Tempta-

tion, then we say, it is very improbable that the Devil should have an immediate Hand, either in all of them, or in most of them; for indeed, there is no need he should concern himself in every particular Action: For the Generality of Men are too ready to commit Sin, without waiting for a Temptation from him; to that Pitch of Degeneracy is the Nature of Mankind arrived, that, God knows, many of us are too prone to do naughty Things even without a Tempter, and there is no Doubt but we do a great many when no one doth instigate us to them, but we blindly follow our own Appetites and Passions, and the evil Habits, and Customs, that we have brought upon ourselves; and when there happens a Case, that there doth need a Tempter to a bad Action, why, alas! there are too many visible ones, that we converse with, that take the Devil's Office out of his Hands, and render his Assaults perfectly needless.

But, Fourthly and Lastly, Whether the Devil doth immediately tempt us to our Sins, or doth not, yet this will make but little Difference as to the Guilt, if we have committed them. I would ask any one that is drawn to commit Lewdness, or Drunkenness, or the like, Whether he thinks he doth much extenuate his Guilt, either before God, or to his own Conscience, by pleading, that the Company that he was engaged in, did tempt him to these Sins, and that he had not been guilty of them, if he had not lit into that

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Conversation. I dare say, he will not be so partial to himself, as to think this is any tolerable Excuse: And if the human Temptations we meet with in the World, be no just Excuse for our Sins, it is certain, the Devil's Temptations can be none neither: For it is certain, the Devil cannot tempt more strongly than Men can do, and tho' he may convey his Temptations in another Kind of Way, than those of Mankind are applied, yet let them be conveyed as they will, we are as much at Liberty (as I said before) whether we will yield to them, and have as much Power to resist them, as we have to resist those that come upon us in the ordinary Way of Conversation or Example, and the like. So that, when all is done, we are to lay the Guilt of our Sins nowhere, but at our own Doors: Whether the Devil applied the Temptation to us, or applied it not, it matters not much; it was we ourselves, that, by consenting, brought the Sin upon us.

And thus much of our Third Head of Inquiry; those that remain I shall refer to the next Time.



S E R M O N V.

2 C O R. II. II.

*Lest Satan should get an Advantage of us ; for
we are not ignorant of his Devices.*



THE Subject I am now upon is the Devil's Temptation; a Point which creates a great deal of Trouble to some Sorts of People.

In order to the discoursing clearly upon it, I propos'd these six following Heads to be inquired into:

First, Whom we are to understand by Satan, or the Devil.

Secondly, Whether the Devil hath ordinarily a Power to tempt Men, especially us Christians.

Thirdly, Whether all our Temptations to Sin do arise from the Devil, or are to be ascribed to him.

Fourthly, Whether the Devil hath a Power to tempt all Men alike, or the same Men at different Times.

Fifthly,

Fifthly, Whether we can distinguish the Devil's Temptations, from the evil Suggestions that arise in our own Minds from other Causes.

Sixthly, What we are to say of those wicked blasphemous Thoughts, and other troublesome Fancies, that are often injected into the Minds of melancholy People, and which are usually thought and called the Devil's Temptations in a most proper Sense; and what are the most proper Advices to be given in that Case.

The three former of these Inquiries I have already spoken to in my last Discourse, and there is no need I should repeat any Thing I then said concerning them, in order to the making Way for what I am now to deliver; save only this, that I then largely proved from the Scripture, that tho' the Devil hath not so great a Power over us Christians, as he had over Mankind before our Saviour's Appearance, or as he has still in some Countries, where the Light of the Gospel never shone; yet nevertheless, we are not exempted altogether from his Assaults: He hath a Power of tempting us still left him, which he doth frequently exercise in such Manner, and at such Times as God is pleased to permit.

Taking now this for granted, I proceed to my fourth Inquiry, which is this: Whether we Christians are equally exposed to the Devil's Temptations, or whether he hath not more Power to tempt some than others, and the

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the same Persons more at some Times, than at other Times.

To this I answer: It is very reasonable to believe, nay, it is very certain, that the Devil hath not Power over all Persons alike, nor upon the same Person always equally; but every one, as he is more or less under the Conduct of God's Spirit, and under the Protection of his holy Angels, so is he less or more obnoxious to the Snares of the Devil. And every Man likewise, as he grows better or worse in his Morals, as he leads a more holy or a more sensual wicked Life, so is he more or less under the Care of the Holy Spirit, and the good Angels.

Some Persons, that are intirely and heartily the Servants of God, and walk closely with him in the Exercise of all Christian Virtues; these Persons are so much under the Guidance and Government of God's Spirit, and are so guarded by the invisible Ministers of the Kingdom of Light, that it is to be hoped the Devil hath but little Access to them; nay, perhaps none at all, unless there fall out some extraordinary Occasion, that God, for the greater Exercise and Improvement of their Virtue, may think fit to suffer the Devil to create them some Disturbance, as it was in the Case of *St. Paul*; who, lest he should be puffed up thro' the Gifts of Revelations, which were vouchsafed to him, there was, as he tells us, given him a Thorn in the Flesh; an Angel of Satan to buffet him. And tho' he prayed thrice, that it might be removed, yet the Answer

swer which was given him was, *My Grace is sufficient for thee*; see 2 Cor. xii. 7. Intimating, that God would not remove the Temptation, but however he should so far assist him with his Grace, that the Temptation should do him no Mischief:

Thus, I say, the Case stands, as to good and holy Men; the Devil hath ordinarily but very little to do with them; but as for others, that do not thus endeavour to recommend themselves to God's Favour, but are loose and careless in their Lives, and have no Sense of Religion upon their Minds, or Fear of God before their Eyes, I do not doubt but the Devil hath a much greater Power over those; and tho' they may not be wholly abandoned by God, but are still under the Care of his general Providence, by which the Devil is kept from committing those downright Violences, and putting those gross Cheats and Abuses upon Mankind, especially Christian Professors, which otherwise he would; yet, so long as they continue in this State of Irreligion, they are, in a great Measure, under his Conduct, and still, the worse they grow, the more they are so. And if once they come to that Pitch of Wickedness, that they let themselves loose to all Kind of Vice, and commit Sin with Greediness, without Remorse or Reflection; then it is to be feared, they may be said to be given over to the Power of the Devil; *To be his Slaves and Vassals, and to be led captive by him at his Will and Pleasure;*

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sure; which are the very Expressions of *St. Paul*, concerning such Persons: So that even as to bad Men, the Devil hath not always the same Power, but over some he hath a greater, and over others a less, still in Proportion to their Degrees of their Wickedness and Degeneracy. As the Operations of the holy Spirit are various, according to the Capacity and Disposition of the Subject he works upon, there being some who are not yet in the State of Regeneration, whom he only invites and solicits by his holy Motions to amend their Lives, and to become holy and virtuous: But, others, that are actually regenerate, he dwells within them as in a Temple, and is a constant Principle in them of holy and virtuous Actions: So it is in some Measure as to the Devil's Operations upon Men; some Men he only tempts, but others he hath so great a Dominion over, that tho', it may be, he cannot properly be said to possess them, or to dwell in them, yet they are as much his own, as if he did. Thus as *St. Stephen*, in the 6th of the *Acts*, is said to be filled with the good Spirit, so *Ananias* in the 5th of the *Acts*, after he had set his Heart to do that Wickedness, for which *St. Peter* struck him dead, is said to be filled with the bad Spirit. *Why hath Satan* (saith *St. Peter*) *filled thine Heart to lye to the Holy Ghost?*

And as it is thus with respect to bad Men compared one with another, so it is with Respect to the same Persons at several Times,

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as they grow more wicked. When *Judas* first entered upon a Design of betraying our Saviour, then it is only said, That *the Devil put it into his Heart*; he only tempted him to it, *John* xiii. 2. But when he had given his intire Consent to the Action, and, notwithstanding our Saviour's Discovery of him at Supper, still persisted in that wicked Design, having his Heart fully bent upon it; then it is told us, that Satan entered into him, as you have it in the 27th Verse; he had now gotten full Dominion over him, and from henceforward made him act as he pleased.

The Reason, for which I insist upon this Point, and the Use I make of it, is this; that it infinitely concerns all of us to keep close to God and our Duty; and as we love our Souls, to have a care of all wilful open Crimes, that do wound our Consciences, and dishonour our Religion. For all such Crimes, as they grieve the Holy Spirit, and drive him away from us, so do they put us out of the particular Protection of the good Angels, and leave us more exposed to the Assaults and Temptations of wicked Spirits, that bear us evil Will.

So long as we walk uprightly before God, and in all our Actions do heartily endeavour to approve ourselves to him, we need not fear the least Mischief or Damage from any of the Powers of Darknes; and though they may now and then be permitted to spread their Temptations before us, yet this shall

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shall redound to our own greater Benefit and Comfort. But every great and wilful Departure from God and our Duty, gives the Devil an Advantage over us; and that Advantage he may so manage and improve, (unless we, by our timely Repentance, and return to our Duty, prevent the ill Consequences) that he will more and more get us under his Power, 'till at last God give us over, and we be wholly reduced among the Number of the Devil's Children and Servants: And when we are once come to this sad Condition, he is (without an extraordinary Interposition of Divine Mercy) so sure of us, that he will not need to throw away much of his Time and Pains, in tempting us to this or the other particular evil Action; for, being acted by his Principle, we shall run fast enough on, in doing his Business, without his immediate Instigation: Nay, as I said in my former Discourse, we shall take his Office out of his Hands, and prove Devils to those about us, by tempting them to be as bad as we ourselves are; but God Almighty preserve us all from this deplorable State.

My fifth Inquiry upon this Argument, is this; Whether it be possible for us, ordinarily to distinguish the Devil's particular Temptations, from those that come to us other ways; as for Instance, from our own vicious Inclinations, or from the Men of the World.

In

In answer to this, I say, that as far as we can judge by Reason and Experience, it is hardly possible for us to distinguish them. My Reason is, that tho' the Devil hath a Power of making Application to our Minds, in a more immediate way, than by the Means of our outward Senses, yet such is the Constitution of our Natures, that he can convey nothing to our Minds, but just in such a Manner as our own Thoughts and Reasoning are occasioned in us; and those Things he represents, will make just such Impressions upon our Minds, as the Things that are represented by other Causes, upon other Occasions. So that it will be impossible for us to distinguish between these Suggestions that he causeth in us, and those that arise from the Temperament and Complexion of our own Bodies.

To give a fairer Account of this. The Motions which are made in our Bodies to that which is good, and the Temptations which are suggested to that which is evil, are, without Doubt, presented and performed in the same way. There is no doubt, but all Christians have a great deal of Assistance from the Spirit of God, and his holy Angels, in the way of Godliness. It is to the working of the Holy Spirit in our Hearts, that every good Man owes his spiritual Regeneration, or new Birth; and it is likewise to the Influences of the same Spirit, that he owes his Proficiency and Growth in Grace and Virtue.

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Nay, even those, that are not in a State of Grace, that are not yet regenerate, but live loosely and carelessly; yet so long as there are any Hopes of them, so long the Spirit of God strives with them; so long he takes occasion to solicit and tempt them; (if I may use the Word in that Sense) to leave that Course of Life they are engaged in, and to become seriously pious and religious. In a Word, both the Good and the Bad do receive a great many good Motions, from the Divine Spirit: A thousand holy Thoughts are suggested to our Minds by him, and by the holy Angels that act under him for the Good of the Church of God. But yet all these Motions and Suggestions, nay, all the Operations of these heavenly Spirits upon us, are performed in so natural, so familiar, so imperceptible a way, that it will be hard for any Man to say that he can distinguish them from the Actings of his own Mind. We feel them no otherwise, than we do our own Thoughts and Meditations; nor can we in the least distinguish them, by the manner of their affecting us, from our natural Reasonings, and the natural Operations of Arguments and Motives upon our Minds.

And this Imperceivableness of the Impressions made upon our Souls by the Holy Spirit, was that which our Saviour signified to *Nicodemus*, in the 3d of *St. John*, by the Similitude of a Wind, *which*, saith he, *we hear the Sound of; but we know not whence it*

it cometh, not whither it goeth: That is, we find the Effects of it, which it leaves behind it, but know not at all the Way of its Motion; *even so, saith he, is every one that is born of the Spirit.* And thus, without doubt, it is as to the Motions and Temptations of the contrary Spirits; the Spirits of Darkness, they solicit us to Evil several ways; sometimes, by setting on our Acquaintance to tempt us; sometimes, by exciting our Passions and Appetites, upon the Presence of a tempting Object; by suggesting to our Minds some Motives and Considerations, that may more effectually recommend a Sin to us; or, by bringing to our Remembrance something that may render us more inclinable to it. But now, all these Operations of theirs are wrought in a Method so suitable, so proportionate to our Natures, and to our Ways of Acting, that, as in the outward Temptations, it is impossible to distinguish, when our Friends tempt us on their own accord, and when the Devil sets them on to tempt us: So, in the inward Temptations that are made more immediately to our Souls, it is impossible to know, when our evil Thoughts and Desires are the Results purely of our Minds, occasioned by the natural Constitution, or the present Circumstances we are in; and when they are suggested to us by any evil Spirit.

I speak of their ordinary Actings; for, as for the extraordinary Inspirations of Men by

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the Spirit of God, in the Age of Miracles ; or the extraordinary Actings of the Devil, in Persons that are possessed ; of these, I say, I speak not. In truth, the Actings of Spirits upon our Minds, whether they be good or bad, are performed in a Way so like our own acting, that we could not have known that they make any immediate Application to our Minds, or indeed have any thing to do with us, were it not that the holy Scripture declares that they have such a Power, and do exercise it ; and that the visible Effects in our Lives, which are consequent upon their Actings, do confirm to us what the Scripture hath declared.

As for what has been sometimes said, that we may know the Devil's Suggestions from the Motions of our own Minds, by the Suddenness and Unexpectedness of them, and the Violence and Impetuousness, with which they are accompanied ; I must confess, I think it has no great Weight in it ; because there is no Man that has seriously attended to the working of his own Mind, but will experience, that he hath often had very odd and extravagant Thoughts come into his Head on a sudden, (and those vigorously enough impressed) without any Occasion, that he can give an Account of, where, yet, there has not been the least Reason to suspect, that the Devil had any Hand in the infusing of them ; because they were not at all relating to his Interest : But (as there is great Reason to believe)

lieve) they did purely and solely arise from the present Temper and Motion of his Animal Spirits, which, accordingly as they move regularly or irregularly, more briskly or more slowly, have a Power of exciting in the Soul, Thoughts and Fancies, of a differing Nature. And hence come all the Extravagancies of Dreams, the odd Flights and Recoveries of those that are in feverish Distempers, and likewise the strange Conceits and Fancies of melancholy and hypochondriacal Persons; of some of which I now come to give an Account, in my sixth and last Inquiry: And that is this:

What we are to say to those wicked and blasphemous Thoughts, and other extravagant Fancies, that are oftentimes injected into the Minds of good People.

It is not all Persons that do complain of these kind of Thoughts; those that are very bad, are seldom troubled with them. Nor is it all good Persons, that are thus haunted, but chiefly those that are of a melancholy Constitution, those of the devout Sex, Women, are more thus afflicted than the other Sex. These that I speak of are grievously disturbed, with odd, unreasonable, nay and sometimes impious, blasphemous Phantasies, which are suggested to their Minds, they do not know how, nor upon what Occasion: But, the more they strive against them, still the more impetuously do they come into their Heads, and then especially, when they

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set themselves to the more solemn Exercise of Religion, and endeavour to be more than ordinarily devout: At these Times, to be sure, they shall be most grievously tormented with them. What now shall we say to these Things?

The Persons themselves, that are thus exercised, do not in the least doubt, but that all this comes from the Devil; nay, they have sometimes such dreadful Apprehensions of his Power over them, that they are apt to fancy that God hath withdrawn himself from them, and given them up intirely to him; and that these wicked Thoughts of theirs are the very Sin against the Holy Ghost, of which there is no Pardon. These Persons are much to be pitied, because, really, the Condition they are in, renders their Lives very uneasy and uncomfortable; but yet they are certainly more afraid than hurt, and that which they complain of so tragically, seems not to carry any great Danger along with it; for truly all this is to be looked upon, rather as an Infelicity, or a natural Affliction, which they ought to bear patiently, as they do other Crosses and Misadventures, than as a Guilt, that should lie upon their Consciences. And so far are these kind of Thoughts (be they never so bad) from being the Effects of God's letting loose the Devil upon them, or from being the Sin against the Holy Ghost, which is the greatest of all Sins; that I am verily persuaded, that
they

they are no Sins at all, so long as they do not contribute to their coming into their Minds, nor give consent to them while they are there. And it is very certain, that those Persons, that are never thus troubled and disturbed about their Thoughts, who, yet, so little govern their own Minds, as to let their Heads be a constant Scene of abundance of vain, and loose, and naughty Fancies, favouring of Ambition, or Covetousness, or Voluptuousness, or Uncharitableness, or the like; I say, these Persons are in a much more dangerous Condition, through such Thoughts as these, which please and delight them, than these honest scrupulous Christians, that are thus grievously perplex'd at the wicked Imaginations, which they cannot help. Well, but what Account can we give of this sort of Thoughts? And what is to be prescribed in order to a Cure of them? Why, of these two Things I will give you my Thoughts very briefly.

And I begin with the first, What Account is to be given of them? Are such Thoughts really the Effects of the Devil's Temptations upon our Minds, or are they the Results of our own Temper and Complexions?

To this I answer, That tho' I dare not be positive in this Matter any way, yet I verily believe that, for the most part, they are wholly to be ascribed to the Distemperature of our Bodies, to the irregular Motions of our Animal Spirits, (which are the Instru-

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ments our Souls use in Thinking) occasioned by Hypochondriack Vapours, or Hysterick Passions, or other ill Affections of our natural Humours, and that the Devil hath no Hand in them. This, I say, to me seems most probable; and that, for these Reasons.

First, it seems a hard Thing to believe, that the Devil should have such a constant Access to good Men, or be permitted to exercise so much Power over them, as he must be supposed to have, and to exercise, if he be the Author of all those idle or wicked Thoughts, which they so frequently complain of. It is more reasonable to believe, as I said before, that, being under the perpetual Conduct of God's Spirit, and the Protection of the good Angels, the wicked ones have but little to do with them.

But, Secondly, it deserves to be considered, that the Devil's Time of applying his Temptations is, when he finds us most secure and careless, and not, when we are most watchful and diligent, in keeping our own Hearts. He is most busy about us, when he finds that we have the least Guard upon ourselves, and dreading no Dangers from him, are supine and negligent, about our spiritual Concernments. Here is a fit Occasion, for the Devil to lay his Siege to us, and he may reasonably hope for some Advantage: And, accordingly, it is at such Times as these, that he doth usually assault us. But now, in the Case we are speaking of, it is quite

quite otherwise; for it is not, when we are more remiss, that we are most troubled with these sinful Fancies, but, on the contrary, when we strive most to preserve our Minds in a holy and devout Frame; the more we endeavour to keep these Fancies out of our Heads, still the more we are vexed with them: Which is an Argument, that they are not of the Devil's Injection, who useth to lay his Baits more seasonably and cunningly, but are the Effects of a distemper'd vapour'd Head: Especially, when we take this too into the Consideration, that the Devil generally doth not get much Advantage, by such kind of Suggestions; for, tho' they do sufficiently disturb the Men that have them, yet they generally produce no ill Effect, as to their Morals. On the contrary, they make them a great deal more careful about their Thoughts, and Words, and Actions, than otherwise they would have been; which is no great Indication they come from the Devil, but rather an Argument that they do not.

To which I add, in the Third Place, That the Devil's Temptations, as they are otherwise timed, so they are likewise framed in another kind of way, than these we are now speaking of. His Method is, to apply his Temptations in such Instances as are agreeable to our Inclinations, and that we are most likely to comply with; but not in Instances, which he knows we hate and abhor, and can never be brought to consent to. Thus, for instance.

instance, if the Devil should have a Mind to tempt, by suggesting of Thoughts, he would tempt a proud Man, by filling his Mind with foolish and vain Conceits of himself, and contemptuous Thoughts of other Men: He would tempt a lustful Person, by raising his Desires, and heightening his Imagination of unlawful sensual Pleasures, and the like. Thus now it is reasonable to believe, that the Devil, if he understands his own Interest, should tempt; and thus, without doubt, he does tempt. But it seems very odd and unaccountable, that he should tempt a Man by such Things, as he knows the Man has not only no natural Inclination for, but the greatest Aversion to, of all Things in the World; as it is in the Case we are now speaking of.

But, Fourthly, the great Argument, by which I conclude, that these disturbing Thoughts are not injected by the Devil, (as the Persons afflicted with them are apt to believe) but are owing to an ill Habit of Body, is, that they themselves, if they be asked, can, for the most part, give an Account how, and when, and upon what Occasions, these Disturbances of their Thoughts came upon them. And, by the Account they give, it will sufficiently appear, to all disinterested competent Judges, that their Minds were never disturbed with these Thoughts, till their Bodies were first out of Order; that is to say, either by some great Fit of Sicknes, or by some grievous Cross and Disappointment, that lay

lay heavy upon their Spirits, or by some melancholy Humour, that, thro' the indiscreet Usage of themselves, hath prevailed upon them. I say, if it be nicely inquired into, it will be found, that there was always an Indisposition of Body, precedent to these Disorders of the Mind; and, that this was really the Cause of these Disorders, is evident from hence, that, in all those that we know of, where this Indisposition hath been removed, and the Body restored to its former Health and Vigour, the Disturbances of their Thoughts have presently ceased, and they have been as well in their Minds, as ever they were before.

But if, after all this, any Man will say, that those Thoughts do not take their Rise wholly from bodily Distemper, but that also the Devil hath a Hand in them, namely, thus far, that he takes Advantages of these Disorders in our Humour, and, by the Means thereof, doth either excite these Thoughts in us, or impress them more vehemently upon us (which is indeed the common Opinion of Divines): I say, if any one thinks this to be a better Account of the Matter, he may, for all me, enjoy his own Sentiments; so long as he will agree with me, and (I think all are agreed in it) that these wicked blasphemous Thoughts complained of, are not the Effects of God's forsaking Men, nor are they any Sins in him that seriously strives and prays against them, but only Unhappiness

ness and Afflictions; Afflictions of the same Nature, that Sickneſs and worldly Croſſes are; for even theſe the Devil may ſometimes be permitted, for wiſe and good Ends, to bring upon us, as we have a remarkable Inſtance in the Caſe of *Job*.

But I come to our ſecond Point, upon this Head, which is, concerning the Cure of theſe Diſturbances: To this I ſay, in ſhort, that, it may be, in all Perſons they are never to be cured perfectly; but ſome, ſo long as they carry their Bodies about them, muſt more or leſs expect to have their Virtue exerciſed with them. For I account religious Melancholy, properly ſo called, is as perfect a Diſeaſe, and in ſome Caſes as incurable, as ſome other Diſeaſes incident to human Bodies; but, in moſt Caſes, it is capable of a Cure, and, in all Caſes, it may receive great Comfort, and Relief, and Abatement. Now, in order to either, or both, of theſe Ends, the beſt Expedients that can be preſcribed, are theſe four following:

First of all, It concerns all theſe Perſons very carefully to look after their Bodies; for (if what I have ſaid be true) upon the Cure and Health of them, the Cure and Health of the Mind doth, in a manner, all in all depend. It will concern them, to make uſe of Phyſick, and Exerciſe, and good Company, and a regular Diet, and all other Things that conduce to natural Health, and Chearfulneſs: And to avoid all Things, that may prejudice it;

it; such as long Fasts, and Watchings, and being too much alone. But, to advise about these Things, belongs not to me, but to another Profession, and therefore I say no more about them.

Secondly, It will concern them to keep themselves employed, as much as they can, and, if it be possible, to have always some Work or Business upon their Hands, to exercise their Minds about. Idleness is the worst thing in the World for this sort of Distemper, and indeed those that labour hard, are seldom troubled with it. And therefore, if these Persons have no Affairs to take care of, (which yet few in any Station are without) they must make Business for themselves. But then there is one sort of Business, that they ought to be seriously cautioned against, and that is, the too long, or too intense Application of their Minds to their spiritual Exercise; such as Reading, Meditation, and the like. For, tho' these Employments, above all others, are to be recommended to Persons that have Health and Leisure, yet to such as are in their Condition, they often do more Hurt than Good.

Thirdly, Another Thing that would be of singular Use to these Persons, if they could be persuaded to practise it, is this: Not to lay these Disturbances of their Minds too much to Heart. Let them not be so grievously concerned, when they cannot govern their own Thoughts, as they desire, but a thousand

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stand silly or wicked Fancies do impose themselves upon them, whether they will or no : On the contrary, let them neglect them, let them despise them, and not think themselves the worse, upon account of them : It is their Eagerness to prevent, or stop, this sort of Fancies, and their immoderate Trouble for them afterwards, that is one of the most effectual Means to excite and perpetuate them : Whereas, if they would make no great matter of them, but let them go out, as they came in, without being concerned about them, in all Probability, with a little Degree of Health, they would vanish and die : And they that now complain so much upon that Account, would have as much Peace in their own Minds, as other Men.

But, Fourthly and Lastly, there is one Thing more to be recommended to these Persons, and then I have done, and that is this : Let them never omit any known Duty, either to God or their Neighbours, upon account of the Suggestions, how violent or how troublesome soever they be : Let them never leave off saying their Prayers, at the accustomed Times, or receiving the holy Sacrament, or doing any other Duty, that the Law of Christ hath tied upon them. And tho', upon these Occasions, above all others, they are most distracted by these ungovernable Fancies, yet, for all that, let them go on ; and, how little soever they please themselves

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in these Duties, or how unfit soever they take themselves to be to engage in them, yet let them assure themselves, that God is as much pleased with them, when they do those Duties out of Conscience, and because they think they are bound so to do, (tho' it be with much Infirmary, and a very shatter'd distracted Mind) as if they had satisfied themselves never so much in the Performance of them.

This I say, and I conclude with it: So long as we bear an honest Mind towards God, so long as we do not prevaricate with him, and wilfully depart from the known Rules of our Duty; but endeavour sincerely in all our Actions to obey his Laws; he will accept us, nay, he will reward us, be the Disadvantages we labour under never so great. And, tho' we cannot please ourselves, we shall please him; nay, (as I had occasion to say in one of my former Discourses) he will be better pleased with us, for doing our Duty under these discouraging Circumstances, than if, being free from these Incumbrances, we had done it with more Pleasure to ourselves. And, if the Devil was really as busy about us, as some of us fancy him to be, nay, tho' all the Powers of Hell should set themselves against us, yet, so long as we thus walk, God will protect us. And, if sometimes he doth not, so soon as we desire, remove our Afflictions,

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afflictions, yet he will give us Grace and Strength to bear them, and, after that, reward us for them, by increasing our Glory in the next World, in Proportion to the Difficulty we had to struggle with, in his Service, in this.

And this is all I have to say upon this Argument.



SERMON



S E R M O N VI.

LUKE XIII. 23.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that shall be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the streight Gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.



IN Pursuance of the Argument I have been lately discoursing of in another Place, and which I told you I would go on with as I had Opportunity; I mean to treat now of two other Things, (different from those I then spoke to) and which are often the Occasion of great Disturbances to the Minds of some melancholy People among us; and for that Purpose I have now pitched upon the Words I have read unto you.

As for those that out of Curiosity desire to be satisfied about the Point here proposed to our Saviour, concerning the Fewness of the Saved, (which seems to have been the Temper of those that asked this Question in my Text) they ought to have no other Answer

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than what our Saviour here gives: Which indeed is not a direct Answer to the Question, but good Advice to the Proposer of it. When one said unto him, *Lord, are there few that shall be saved?* Jesus answered, *Strive to enter in at the straight Gate; for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* By which Words he doth not declare whether few or many shall enter into Life; but he seriously addresseth himself to him that made the Question, and the rest of the Company, that they should take care to be found in the Number of those that should; for this did infinitely concern them: But it did not at all concern them to know how few, or how many should be saved.

This, undoubtedly, is the Design of our Saviour's Reply; but yet, it is often interpreted to other Purposes.

Our Saviour, as some are apt to think, doth not so much intend by these Words to represent the great Necessity there is that we should all take Pains, and strive, and labour to approve ourselves his chearful Disciples, and by that means to save our own Souls, (which is that I have now said to be his Design) as to declare to his Hearers the Fewness of those that, after all their Pains, and Labour, and Solitude about their everlasting Salvation, shall attain to it; and they gather from these Words of his, these two Doctrines,

First,

First, That the Number of those that shall be saved, is exceeding small.

Secondly, That a great many may strive, and take Pains to go to Heaven, and yet shall fail of their Ends at last; not so much for the want of Sincerity, as because they are not in the Number of those that God has decreed to be saved.

Such Conclusions as these, very well-meaning People are apt to draw from this Text, and some others: And in truth, the Use they make of them is no way to their own Advantage; for they make such Application of them to themselves, as renders their Lives very uncomfortable, by filling them with Frights and dismal Apprehensions concerning their own Condition, tho' otherwise they be never so desirous and studious to recommend themselves to God, by an innocent and devout Life.

The Truth is, among all the troublesome Reflections that are apt to fall into the Minds of devout People, (especially if they have any Dose of Melancholy in their Constitutions) there is nothing that more disturbs them, nothing that more hinders them from the Enjoyment of themselves, or more discourages them from a vigorous and chearful Prosecution of a holy Life, than these two Thoughts: First, The extreme Fewness of those that shall be saved. Secondly, The Uncertainty they are in, whether they be in the Number of those that are elected to Salvation.

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I think therefore it may do some Service to discourse a little upon these two Points, and to open this Text, and two or three more which relate to this Business, being confident that if they be put into their true Light, they will not cause frightful Ideas to melancholy Persons among us, as they sometimes do.

But in attempting this, I would not have any of you think that I am going to confute these two Doctrines upon which these melancholy Fancies are grounded. I would not have you think that I am going to prove that among the Mass of Mankind there is a greater Number that shall be saved, than shall be damned; or that some People may be saved, tho' they be not elected of God to Salvation from Eternity. No, these are Things that never entred into my Head, and I should be loth to give such a bad Example to others, as I must needs do, if I should pretend to meddle with such Points as these in the Pulpit.

My Business is only this, to offer such Considerations to tender and afflicted Spirits, about these two Points, that may convince them that they have no Reason to draw from hence such melancholy Inferences as they are wont to do: That these Points do not in truth much concern them; but they may, and ought to live chearfully and comfortably, and to go on vigorously in the Ways of Virtue, not doubting of God's Fa-
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vour and Mercy to them, notwithstanding the Fewness of those that shall be saved, and notwithstanding the Uncertainty they are in, of their particular Election from Eternity.

I begin with the first of these Points: The Fewness of those that shall be saved. The Scripture tells us, *That Christ's Flock is but a little Flock*; and our Saviour here, *Strive to enter in at the straight Gate; for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able*: And in another Place he tells us, *That Wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be that enter in thereat; but straight is the Gate, &c.* Nay, so few are these that find this Gate, that (as one not long ago in Print hath been bold to compute the Matter) where one of Mankind enters into it, a Million perhaps go the other Way.

To this I say, First, Let the Number of those that shall be miserable, as much exceed the Number of the Saints as can be well supposed, yet it ought not much to concern those among us that are aptest to be troubled at it, if they only look at themselves. Because whatsoever comes of the rest of the World, they may be in a safe Condition, and be pretty well assured of it. The Ground, I suppose, upon which Men make such a Computation of the comparative Fewness of the Saved is this, that none are supposed to be in a salvable Condition, but those that are Believers and Professors of the true

Religion ; which, in Comparifon of thofe that do not believe and profefs it, have always been, and ftill are, exceeding few. Till the Times of our Saviour, the whole World lay in Darknefs and Ignorance, and horrible Idolatry, except only the Jews, who were a handful of Men. And for fome Years after our Saviour, how very thin fpread were the Chriftians ? And even at this Day, when Chriftianity is become the Religion of many Nations, yet three Parts of the World (as it is probably computed) are Infidels and Unbelievers. So large a Spread hath Judaifm, Mahometifm, and Paganifm, ftill in the World : and even of that fourth Part which owns Chrift's Religion, yet much the greateft Part of that lie covered with Error and Superftition, fo that the true Believers, the true Church of Chrift, and confequently thofe that fhall be faved, lie but in a very little Compafs.

This, I prefume, is the Ground upon which they proceed that make the Number of the Saved to be fo very fmall. But tho' this be a very uncomfortable Reckoning to far the greateft Part of Mankind, yet to us here, who know ourfelves to have the true Gofpel among us, and to be in the right Way to Salvation, it is not fo uncomfortable, if we look only at ourfelves. Here is no Discouragement at all to the Hopes of our Salvation, but only to the Hopes of theirs that are not in fuch happy Circumftances.

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We are God's People, and may be assured we are so, whatever becomes of those that are without.

But it will be said, that even among us that are true Believers, and orthodox in our Principles, yet it is to be feared, that far the greatest Part shall finally miscarry, and therefore (saith a superstitious Person) how know I, but that it may be my Lot amongst the rest? But to this I answer: Suppose it to be so that the greatest Part of Professors do miscarry, What is the Reason of it? Is it not because the greatest Part do not walk up to the Principles of Religion, but are careless, and loose, and vicious in their Lives? Sure it is. And if so, how can this be any Discouragement to you, who are careful to frame your Lives according to your Principles; who do not only profess the true Religion, but endeavour to adorn it by a holy Conversation? The Consideration of the Many that take the broad Way, and perish in it, ought indeed to be an Argument to you, to be very careful of your Steps; but it doth not at all render your Condition more doubtful, or more hazardous, if you have already chosen the straight Gate that leadeth to Life. If indeed Heaven and eternal Happiness was disposed to Mankind, in the way of a Lottery, in which, where one draws a Prize, a thousand meet with Blanks, (tho' yet, they that are disappointed use the same Care and Industry that those do who succeed) I say, if this was

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the Case of Mankind, with reference to the other World, it would make the stoutest of us all to tremble at the Apprehensions of what might be our Destiny.

But, God be thanked, it is not so; tho' the Number of those that perish should be much greater than of those that are prosperous, yet none ever did, or ever shall perish, but thro' his own Fault and Carelessness. And as for those that take care of their Souls, and use those Means that God hath vouchsafed them (how few soever these be) they shall certainly obtain Salvation, and may be as much assured of it, as if the Number of the Saved were as great as they now esteem it small.

So that this Consideration of the Multitude that miscarry, cannot, to a reasonable Man, render the Hopes of his own Happiness in the least more doubtful.

This is the First Thing. Ay, but it may be said, Tho' it do not render his own Happiness suspected, yet still it is a melancholy Consideration to think what shall become of far the greatest Part of the World. Where is the infinite Goodness of God, which we so much extol, when of all those Creatures that he hath made, so small a Handful are designed for Happiness, and all the rest are concluded in a State, far worse than if they had never been born?

To this I answer, in the Second Place;
 —Let us not measure the infinite Goodness of
 God,

God, by the Events that come upon the People of this Earth, which is but a little Part of the vast Creation, and perhaps the very worst Part of it. Tho' here we see the Bad to exceed the Good in Number, and consequently the Miserable to be many more than the Happy, yet it may be quite otherwise in those infinite, spacious, and glorious Regions above, which God fills with his Presence. We Mortals are but a very little, inconsiderable Part of the great Family of God. *In our Father's House are many Mansions* as our Saviour tells us) *all which may be filled with blessed and happy Beings, that live up to the End of their Creation, and cease not to glorify him that made them.* So that let Things go here as ill as we can imagine, yet for all that, it is to be hoped that as full as Earth and Hell are of Devils and evil Men, Heaven is much, exceedingly much fuller of Angels and perfect Spirits.

But, Thirdly, to come home to the Point. How are we certain that the State of this Earth is so bad as some melancholy Persons would represent it? What Reason have we to conclude, that the Number of the Saved is so extremely small, as some narrow spirited Christians would have it believed? Why may it not be quite otherwise? For my part, I would be so far from confining the Mercies of God to a few of this or the other particular Sect or Party, that I would rather say and believe with the holy Psalmist
That

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That he hath spread out his tender Mercies over all his Works. I should think that Man both immodest and rash, that should pass a Sentence of Damnation, even upon all Jews, or Turks, or Heathens; much more upon all his fellow Christians, tho' they be not so good as he; or, though they have the Misfortune to be of a different Persuasion or Communion from him.

God, in the Scripture, hath passed no Sentence upon these People, and therefore why should we? St. *Paul*, that was an Apostle of our Lord's, yet saith, *What have I to do to judge them that are without?* And therefore, much less have we to do to judge them. It is true, we have no explicit Promise from God of Happiness and Salvation to any, but through Faith in Jesus Christ: But doth it therefore follow, that because we cannot assuredly pronounce them happy, that do not believe in Christ, (and therefore perhaps do not believe in him, because the Gospel was never preached to them; I say, doth it therefore follow, that) we must give them up to Damnation? No, it will better become us to leave them to the general, uncovenanted, unpromised Mercies of God, and to say nothing of them. His Servants they are, and to him, their Master, they stand or fall; and if we may not judge those that are Infidels, how much less will it become us to judge those that believe the same Faith in general that we do, tho' perhaps with

a great Mixture of Errors and Superstition and corrupt Practices? But, and if we will judge them, God, who is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all Things, may pass a Judgment quite different from ours. Many of those, whom we distinguish from ourselves by very hard Names; many of those, whom we may look upon as mere moral Men, as ignorant of the true Soul-saving Knowledge of Jesus Christ, nay, as Profane, or Hypocritical, or Superstitious, or Idolatrous, may, through the Merits of Jesus, and a general Repentance of all their Sins known and unknown, find Mercy at the Hands of God at the last Day.

Let us therefore judge nothing before the Time; let us rather hope the best of all Men. Charity, I am sure, (if the Apostle's Description of it be true (will incline us so to do, and it may be, in so doing, we shall think truer than if we did otherwise.

In all Probability, the Number of God's People in this World is much greater than is ordinarily thought, and many will find Acceptance with God (the Searcher of Hearts) in the other World, who were hardly thought on by Men in this.

The Prophet *Elias*, in the 19th Chapter of the first of *Kings*, thus complains to God: *Behold, the Children of Israel have forsaken thy Covenant, thrown down thine Altars, and slain thy Prophets with the Sword: And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my Life*

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Life to take it away. What now is God's Answer to him? *Yet (saith he) have I left me seven thousand Men in Israel that have not bowed the Knee to Baal.* Elias thought he was left alone, but God knew that he had seven thousand Servants beside him; and so we may hope it will be in all Places, and at all Times.

Let us not therefore fright ourselves with these dismal Apprehensions: The Kingdom of God, it is to be hoped, is much larger than we take it to be, and the Condition of Mankind is not so deplorable as our bigotted melancholy Fancies may suggest to us. And even as for those that shall be found reprobate at the last Day, (how many soever they prove to be) yet when the Proceedings of God with Mankind come to be manifested and laid open, (as they then shall be to the whole World) we shall be so far from complaining of the Severity of God's dealing even with them, that we shall have Reason to magnify, not only the Equity of his Justice, but his Goodness and Mercy likewise.

But then, Fourthly and lastly, as for these Texts of Scripture that are produced in favour of this Opinion, of the extreme Fewness of those that shall be saved, if they be examined, they will appear to relate quite to another Purpose.

Christ doth indeed call his Disciples a little Flock; *Fear not, (saith he) little Flock;*
for

for it is your Father's good Pleasure to give you the Kingdom, Luke xii. 32. But what if by the Kingdom here be not meant the Kingdom of Heaven, but Christ's Kingdom here in this World? So that the Sense is this, *Fear not, little Flock,* though you now be a very small Company, and unlikely to grapple with all that Opposition that the Devil and the World will raise against you, yet be not for this discouraged: This Religion of mine, which you now profess, shall get such Ground in the World, as in due Time to be advanced into the Thrones of Princes. You Christians, as inconsiderable as you now are, shall at last possess the Kingdom, as they actually did.

But suppose we interpret the Kingdom of God here of the Kingdom of Heaven, yet it doth not make much for the Purpose that melancholy Persons apply it to; 'tho' Christ's Flock was a little Flock then, (because he had but just begun to gather it) yet it is not so little a Flock now; it is, God be thanked, vastly increased, in comparison of it then, when our Saviour spoke these Words. And tho' still it cannot be denied but that it is a little Flock, in comparison of the great Numbers of People that are not yet come into the Fold, yet a Time may come when they also shall be brought in, and when all the Kingdoms of the World shall become the Kingdoms of our Lord Jesus, and the Knowledge of the Lord shall cover the Earth, as
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the Waters cover the Sea, as the old Prophet hath foretold. And when this comes to pass, then will this Saying of our Saviour's be fulfilled to the utmost, even in the first Sense I gave of the Kingdom.

As for the other Text I mentioned, in the 7th of *Matth.* where our Saviour tells us, *That streight is the Gate, and narrow is the Way that leadeth to Life, and few there be that find it; but wide is the Gate, and broad is the Way that leadeth to Destruction, and many there be that go in thereat:* By the Gate, here, that leadeth to Life, is undoubtedly to be understood the taking upon us the Christian Religion, and framing our Lives according to it, which is the only Way to which God hath promised Salvation. Now this Course of Life, in Comparison to the Way of the World, the Way of Vice, and Sensuality, and Wickedness, which is the Gate that leads to Destruction, is both streight and narrow, that is to say, it is both strict and difficult.

But then there are these two Things to be remembered. First, That this maketh nothing to the Discouragement of those that have already entered this streight Gate, and are already Christians, of which there are vast Numbers all over the World, as it is to be hoped, though not so many as those that are in the broad Way, the Way of the World.

But,

But, Secondly, tho' this Gate of Christianity, and which is the only Passage unto Life, be always streight and narrow, that is, requires great Strictness, and is attended with some Difficulties, yet it is not so streight now by a great deal as it was, when our Saviour spoke these Words; it was then extremely streight, by reason of the many Oppositions, and Persecutions, and worldly Terrors, which both hinder'd Men from entring into it, and which attended the Course of all them that had already undertaken it. But, God be thanked, it is not now streight in this Sense to us, but wide enough in all Reason; for we have met with no worldly or outward Discouragements, in the Way of our Christianity; at least, generally speaking, we have not, and we hope we never shall. On the contrary, we may truly say, as Things by the Mercy of God stand among us, that in point of worldly Motives and Considerations, in point of Ease and Pleasure, and temporal Advantages, a Man hath as much Encouragement to be good, as to be bad; to live a holy and a christian Life, as to live a dissolute and prophane one; so that the Case of Christianity being so much altered from what it was when our Saviour first preached it, these Words of his cannot be so properly urged for the Purpose they are brought for.

But there is a Third Passage of our Saviour, which seems to make more for this Purpose than either of the other; and that
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is the Text I am now upon; and therefore (tho' I have spoken something to it already) yet I shall now give a more particular Account of it.

Our Saviour is here put upon speaking to that very Point we are now discoursing of: *One said unto him, Lord, are there few that shall be saved?* This was the Question. Our Saviour's Answer to this Question was this; *Strive to enter in at the straight Gate, for many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able.* Now as to this, I say, far be it from us to understand this Answer of our Saviour's in the Sense that some Persons would have it taken in; namely, that hereby he intimates that they are but exceeding few that shall be saved, and that many shall earnestly apply themselves, and industriously seek to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, and yet, notwithstanding all their Pains and Endeavours, shall fall short of it. If this indeed was the Meaning of our Saviour, it would be one of the most uncomfortable Texts in the whole Scripture. But, without Question, there is no such Thing here intimated, as will appear to any that will strictly examine the Passage. The Case is this: One that was more curious than serious, asks him concerning the Success of his Doctrine in the World: Whether many or few would embrace it, and so by the Means thereof obtain eternal Salvation. This is the Meaning of the Question. What now saith our Saviour

our to this? Doth he give a direct Answer to the Question? No, not at all; he neither tells whether many, or whether few should be saved: But, as his Manner was, when he was asked Questions, that had more of Curiosity in them than any Tendency to benefit the Askers, instead of directly answering the Question proposed, he takes Occasion from thence of giving good Advice and Counsel to the Hearers; and thus he doth here. Jesus saith unto him, *Strive to enter in at the straight Gate; for many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able*; as if he had said, Be not you so curious to inquire into the Number of those that shall embrace my Doctrine, and be saved by it; but rather take you care that you yourselves be found in that Number. I will assure you, the Thing itself will oblige you to it; for, as the World now stands, straight is the Gate of Christianity, by which you are to enter into Life; so straight, that it will require not only great Sincerity, but great Earnestness and Vehemence, in whoever undertakes it; which is a great deal more than a careless Wish, or a slight Desire and Endeavour. He that will go to Heaven in the Way that I propose, must strive heartily, and not seek faintly; must *ἀγωνίζεσθαι*, (that is the Word our Saviour here useth) that is to say, he must do as those that run a Race, or engage themselves in any other Strife for Mastery; he must put out his whole Strength, bend the

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whole Force both of his Body and Mind to the Work he is about; otherwise he may miscarry. A faint Seeking will hardly do the Work. Many of those that have some Will or Desire to enter in at this Gate; and to be my Disciples, when they come to see what temporal Advantages they must part with, and what Hardship they must endure for my Name's sake, will not be able to enter, will not be able to give up themselves to my Religion. It is the Strivers only, those that will take the Kingdom of Heaven by Violence, that will be successful. *Strive to enter in at the streight Gate; for many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able.* It is not here said, many shall strive to enter, and shall not be able; no, none ever strove to enter, but they did it: But it is the Seekers only that shall not be able, that is to say, those that have some Good-will towards Christ's Religion, but have not Sincerity or Courage enough to prosecute it with Diligence and Vigour.

And this, I hope, is sufficient to satisfy those that are uneasy, and doubtful of their own Condition, upon account of the Fewness of those that are to be saved; which was the first Point I was to discourse on.

But, may some say still, there is as great a Difficulty behind; what is all this to me, unless I had some Assurance that I am one of those that are appointed, and ordained, and elected by God to Salvation? If God hath from all Eternity pitched upon such a deter-
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minate Number of Men, whom he designs to make Vessels of Honour, and all the rest of Mankind, who are not thus elected, shall certainly perish, what Comfort can I have, unless I knew that I was one of those that are thus predestinated to Life? For any thing I know, I may be one of those that are from all Eternity doomed to Destruction.

This is the Second Point I am to discourse of, and I shall do it very briefly, and very plainly. And in Answer to this sort of Scruple, I say, in the First Place, That it is the most unreasonable Thing in the World (however Men have got it into their Heads) to trouble ourselves about the eternal Decrees of God; which being infinitely above our Understanding, must therefore certainly be much beyond our Duty to inquire after. That which we have to do, is to look into the revealed Will of God, which is contained in the Holy Scriptures; for from hence, and hence only, we can with any Certainty make a Judgment of our own Condition, whether it be good or bad. Whatever general Promises we there find God hath made to Mankind by Jesus Christ, those we not only safely may, but we ought to apply to ourselves in particular, so far as we perform the Conditions of them; and so, on the other Hand, whatever Threatnings God hath there denounced against disobedient and impenitent Sinners, we are to look upon ourselves as obnoxious to them, if we do not

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prevent our Ruin, by Repentance and Obedience.

This is the Method that God hath appointed for the coming to a true Knowledge of our own State, and the raising Comfort to ourselves; and not the curious prying into the Books of God's eternal Decrees, which are altogether secret to us. If I would have Peace of Conscience, and a comfortable Assurance of my own good Condition, the Way to come by it is not this, to get satisfied in the first Place, that I am one of those Persons whom God from all Eternity did peremptorily decree should be saved, and who consequently cannot possibly miscarry; no, this is a preposterous Way: The true Method is this; I find in the Gospel many general Promises and Declarations of God's Kindness to Mankind; as thus for Instance, from the Mouth of our Saviour; *God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life.* My Business is now to inquire, whether I do truly believe in Jesus Christ, which I am to come to the Knowledge of, by an Examination of my own Heart, and Life, and Conversation. If now, upon such Examination, I find that I have all the Qualifications of a true Believer, I may with Confidence apply this general Promise to myself in particular, and raise this Conclusion to myself, that since I find I do believe in the only begotten Son of God,
assuredly

affuredly God doth accept me; and if I continue in this Estate till my Life's End, I shall not perish, but have everlasting Life.

Let us but satisfy ourselves that we perform the Conditions which Christ hath required of Mankind, in order to Salvation, (which Conditions are all summ'd up in these two Words, Faith and Repentance) and we may be as certainly assured that we belong to God, and are intitled to his Favour, as if we saw our particular Names recorded in a Book, among them that are appointed to Salvation.

Away therefore with all Fears and Doubts concerning our eternal Predestination. Let us never be solicitous in inquiring, whether God hath decreed such a particular Number of Persons (in Exclusion to the rest of Mankind) to eternal Life; or, if he hath done so, whether we be in the Number of them; but let us take care to secure our own Duty. *Secret Things belong to the Lord our God; but the Things that are revealed, to us, and to our Children, that we may do all the Works of his Law; as we have it in Deuteronomy.* Let us take care to obey God's Commandments: Let us live as well as we can, and if we do so, it is certain we cannot miscarry; and if God hath made any such eternal Decrees concerning the Lot of particular Persons, it is certain likewise that we are in the Number of those that are predestinated to

eternal Salvation, provided we continue in our Faith and Obedience.

But, Secondly, Let me add this further upon this Head, and I conclude. What if there be really no such Grounds for those Fears and Doubts concerning our own State, from the Decrees of God, as the Objection supposeth? What if the Doctrine, upon which they are built, be altogether without Foundation? These Fears I am speaking of, do proceed from this Supposition, that there are a determined Number of Men elected from all Eternity to Salvation, and that all the rest are doomed to Destruction.

As for the former Part of this Supposition, I do not now make any Question of it; but as to the latter Part, I justly may and do. Nay, if by God's predestinating Men to Destruction, be meant his decreeing Men from Eternity to Hell-Fire, without Respect to their evil Actions, or wicked Lives, (as it must be meant in the Objection, otherwise it is not to the Purpose) I say, the Doctrine is certainly false: God never passed any such Sentence upon any of his Creatures. Whatever the Sense be of God's electing some, and passing by others, which I shall not here inquire into, these two Things I dare confidently lay down for Truth, because the Scripture, in very many plain Texts, doth warrant me so to do: The first is, that as Christ died for all Mankind, so all Mankind that do believe in Christ, and profess his Religion, (for as
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for those that are out of the Pale of the Church, I have nothing to do with them; I say, all such) are in a Capacity of being saved. God is so far from putting a Bar to the Salvation of any, by any eternal absolute irrelative Decrees of his, that he designed Mercy to them all without Exception, and it is in their Power, by the Grace of God both preventing and assisting, that goes along with them, to accept of that Mercy; and if they do so, they shall without Fail attain everlasting Life.

The second Thing is this; whatever God's Decrees are concerning Men, it is certain, no Man ever was, or ever shall be damned, but it was, or shall be, purely thro' his own Fault. And he might have avoided the Damnation, if he would have taken that Care of himself, that in point of Prudence and Self-preservation he should have done, and which, in other Cases, he sometimes doth not fail to do.

If now these two Things be true, as they may be evidently proved from the Holy Scriptures, what little Grounds has any Man living to be troubled about God's Decrees concerning him, since he may be assured that he shall never miscarry, but thro' his own Fault; and that it is in his Power, if he will make use of that Grace which God affords him to prevent miscarrying, and to attain to everlasting Salvation? And what can any reasonable Man desire more than this?

I know that there are a great many that do not love to hear of any thing to be done on their Parts, but would have all God's Dealings with Mankind to be so intirely resolved into his uncontroulable Power, as that whoever is saved, is to be saved by his irresistible Grace, without any Concurrence of their own. But sure I am, this Notion of God's bringing Men to Happiness, neither suits with the holy Scriptures, nor with the Nature he hath given to Mankind. We readily grant, and it is certainly true, that all that comes to pass in this World, doth come to pass according to the Counsel of God's Will: But then it is as true, that God hath decreed and determined all Things so as to give a full Scope to the Exercise of that Power and Liberty that he hath in our Creation bestowed upon us. He hath so made his Decrees, as that it is from Eternity, a fixed unmoveable Point, that Mankind, who by their Nature are free Agents, should in the next World be happy or miserable, only by their own Choice. God determined in the Beginning, to set Life and Death before us, by our Lord Jesus Christ (and accordingly he hath done so); he decreed likewise from all Eternity, that all of us that chose Life upon those Terms and Conditions that Christ hath proposed it, should certainly enjoy it. He hath likewise given every one of us Power and Ability sufficient to choose that Life, and to make good those Terms and Conditions; and what-

whatever Man or Woman among us does do that, that Person is certainly elected; and whoever doth otherwise, is certainly, by the Decrees of God, a Reprobate; that is to say, he having rejected God's Grace, God will reject him at the last Day.

This now is all that we can, conclusively and positively, pronounce concerning God's Decrees, and thus much we may pronounce; and this is enough, both to satisfy our Scruples, and to excite our Industry. It is certain by God's Word, that every one of us may be saved, nay, shall be saved everlastingly, if we be sincere in our Endeavours after it. I do not say, if we do all that we can do towards the obtaining Salvation, for that perhaps no Man doth; but if we be sincere in that Degree, that the Infirmary and Degeneracy of human Nature will ordinarily allow us: If we use the same Sincerity and Industry, in recommending ourselves to God, and our Lord Jesus, and procuring our own everlasting Salvation, that Men ordinarily and customarily do, in prosecuting any great Affair in the World, that they have set their Hearts upon: I say, whosoever is thus far sincere as to his spiritual Concernments, shall undoubtedly go to Heaven. And sure this is enough, abundantly enough to silence all the Doubts, and Fears, and Perplexities of the most timorous Persons for ever. I hope they themselves do not desire to go to Heaven upon easier Terms; or if they do, they are very unreasonable.

reasonable. And on the other hand, if we are not thus serious in our Endeavours to lead a Holy and Christian Life, all our other Pretences to Salvation will signify nothing; it will be in vain to rely upon any other Election than that which is made sure by a lively Faith, and a virtuous Conversation. We are all of us the Elect of God, if we live as becomes the Disciples of Christ Jesus; but we shall all be found Reprobates, if we do not.

O what a Spur is here to our Industry! How careful should we be not to rely upon a barren ineffectual Faith, but to adorn our Profession by a godly and a religious Life! How diligent should we be, to make our Calling and Election sure, by adding to our Faith Virtue, and to our Virtue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godliness, and to Godliness brotherly Kindness, and to brotherly Kindness Charity! knowing that if these Things be in us, and abound, we shall never be barren nor unfruitful in the Work of the Lord: but an Entrance will be administred unto us more abundantly, into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus.

I conclude all, with that memorable Saying of St. Paul in the 2d of the Rom. the 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Verses; all which makes to our Purpose: *God will render to every Man according to his Works; to them who by patient Continuance in Well-doing, seek for*
Glory,

Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, eternal Life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the Truth, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. But Glory, and Honour, and Peace, to every Man that worketh Good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no Respect of Persons with God.

May God Almighty give us all Grace so to behave ourselves in this World, that we may in the other receive those glorious Rewards which our Lord Jesus hath promised to all his faithful Disciples. This God of his infinite Mercy grant, &c.





SERMON VII.

ACTS XVI. 31.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.



YOU may remember, that I have not long ago preached several Sermons about religious Trouble of Mind, and I then made it my Business to give an Account of sundry Points, which thro' their not being well understood, had a great Influence, if not in causing, yet in the increasing that sort of Affliction. And I told you that, as I had Opportunity, I would go on with this Argument, and speak to some other Points, which often prove the Occasion of many Frights and Doubts to timorous and melancholy Persons. Having therefore an Opportunity now given me, I mean to proceed where I left off.

Five Causes of religious Trouble, which arise from the Misapprehension of Things, I have already spoken to; that is to say,

First,

First, The Opinion Men have taken up about Desertion, or God's forsaking them.

Secondly, The Loss of their spiritual Comfort, and the Dulness and Deadness of their Hearts, as to all religious Duties.

Thirdly, The being haunted with wicked and blasphemous Thoughts.

Fourthly, The extreme Fewness of those that shall be saved.

Fifthly, The Uncertainty they are in, as to their particular Election to Salvation.

I now come to consider two other Things, which some melancholy People do often complain of, and which causeth them as much Uneasiness as any other Points I have named: And that is, in the sixth Place, their Want of Faith; and in the seventh Place, their not being truly penitent for their Sins.

Faith and Repentance, they know very well, are the great Gospel Duties, and indeed the only Conditions required to Salvation. And if they want either of these, in what a miserable Condition are they? But yet as Things stand with them, they have neither true Faith, nor true Repentance.

These two Things, I say, I shall now endeavour to give some Satisfaction about, by putting both these Duties in a fair Light, and shewing that good Peoples Uneasinesses and Frights about them, are occasioned purely by their not rightly understanding the Nature of them.

The Seventh Sermon.

I begin with Faith, to which I shall at this Time confine my Discourse. The general Description of that Faith, whereby Christians are to be saved, is given us in these Words of St. *Paul* I have now read unto you. When the Goaler, in the Verse before, had earnestly desired *Paul* and *Silas* to instruct him in the Way of Salvation, saying, *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* The Answer they return to him is, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine House;* so that saving, justifying Faith is to believe on the Lord Jesus.

Well but, say they, whose Cases we are speaking to, this is our Misery, we do not believe on the Lord Jesus; on the contrary, we are forely troubled with Unbelief. If you ask them what Reason they have to think so, do they not believe the Gospel, do they not own our Lord Jesus to be the Son of God, and the Saviour of the World? Yes, they will tell you, they do so; but yet for all that, they want Faith; because they are full of Doubts concerning their Condition; now is not Doubting contrary to Faith? What is it, say they, to believe on the Lord Jesus, but to believe that the Lord Jesus is my Saviour, that his Righteousness is my Righteousness, and that I am one of those for whom he purchased eternal Salvation? But they cannot bring themselves to a firm Belief of this; they cannot thus apply Christ's Benefits to themselves in particular.

lar. Is it not one of the Articles which every Christian doth daily profess; namely, that he believes the Forgiveness of Sins? Why, they cannot say this; they do not heartily and steadfastly believe the Forgiveness of their Sins; and therefore, sure, they want something necessary to saving Faith.

This is the Case, and this I shall now particularly apply myself to; and the rather, because I believe this is a Notion of Faith very common among us; nay, I am afraid it is to be met with in some of our Catechisms and Systems of Divinity.

And here my Business shall be to speak of these two Points:

First, Whether it be necessary to saving Faith, to believe that my Sins are forgiven me, or to make such an Application of Christ's Righteousness to myself, as from hence to be able to conclude, that I in particular am righteous by his Righteousness, and consequently shall be saved by him; or, which comes to the same Thing, whether the Doubting of this be the Sin of Unbelief.

And, *Secondly*, What is the true Notion of that Faith which is in Scripture required, as a Condition of Mens Justification and Salvation. The resolving these two Inquiries is all that can be thought needful, in order to the clearing up all Difficulties in this Matter.

I begin with the First Inquiry. Whether it be of the Essence of saving Faith, to believe

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lieve that my Sins are forgiven me; or to apply Christ's Righteousness so particularly to myself, as to believe that I am thereby a justified Person.

Those Persons whose Case I am now speaking to, and likewise a great many others among us, do verily think that this is necessary to the having true Faith, and that to doubt of it, is the Sin of Unbelief. But now, if upon Examination it proves to be otherwise, then I suppose they will be easily convinced that there was no Ground for their Fears and Perplexities about this Matter; for they may have true Faith, how great soever their Doubts may be of the Forgiveness of their Sins.

Now what I have to say as to this Point, I shall represent in these four following Particulars: First of all, let it be considered that it cannot be necessary to the having true Faith, to believe that which God hath no-where revealed. For when we speak of Faith in a Theological Sense, (that is to say, as it is required of us as a Duty by God) as we do all along in this Discourse, it can have no other Object than divine Revelation, and is always commensurate with that; nor can it extend farther than that goes. So that whatever God hath revealed, that is an Object of our Faith, and we are bound to believe it: Whatever God hath not revealed, that is no Object of our Faith, nor are we concerned in Point of Religion, whether

ther we believe it, or no. This now being so, I ask, Where is it declared in the whole Scripture, (which takes in all the Revelations of God to Mankind, and makes up an intire Object of our Faith; I say, Where is it there declared) that my Sins are forgiven me; or, that Christ's Righteousness is so imputed to me, that I shall be saved eternally? And, if these Things be not there declared and revealed, then it is certain, it can be no Part of my Faith, to believe them; nor can it be a sinful Unbelief in me, to doubt of them.

But to this it will be said, Tho' it be not declared in the Scriptures, concerning particular Persons, and by Name, that their Sins are forgiven them; yet all particular Persons are commanded to apply the general Promises of Christ to themselves, as much as if they had been made to them by Name; and if they do not this, they are guilty of Unbelief. And this is the Case of these Persons I am now speaking of; they do not apply the Promises of Forgiveness of Sins to themselves in particular; they do not lay hold of the Merits of Christ, so as to make his Righteousness their Righteousness; and this is Want of Faith in them.

Well, to this I say, in the second Place, Let us at present admit this Notion of Faith, that they contend for; but then, pray see the Consequence. If God hath commanded all Men to apply the Promises of Christ to themselves in particular; and that to do this

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is Faith ; and not to do it, Unbelief ; then it follows for certain, that the worst Men in the World are bound, under Penalty of eternal Damnation, to make such an Application to themselves. They are bound, if they would not be condemned amongst the Unbelievers, to believe the Remission of Sins ; that is, the Remission of their own Sins in particular. They are bound to believe, that Christ's Righteousness is as much imputed to them, as if they were righteous themselves ; I say, they are bound to do all this, because every Man is bound to have true Faith in Jesus Christ : And, if this be true Faith in Jesus Christ, then, whenever they can bring up themselves to such a Pitch of Confidence, as to be able thus to do, they are as true Believers, and as much in the Number of the Faithful, as those that live the most holy and pure Lives ; how careless, and dissolute, and vicious soever their Lives and Conversation be. But this is so intolerable a Consequence, that I believe no sober Man will own it ; and therefore we may from hence form an undeniable Argument, that Faith in Christ, and Application of his Promises to ourselves, are two quite different Things.

But, Thirdly, to come home to the Point, let it be farther consider'd, notwithstanding all this Talk of laying hold on Christ's Righteousness, and applying his Merits to ourselves in particular ; so as to believe that we are righteous thro' his Righteousness ; and that,

that, thro' the Merits of his Sufferings, all our Sins are actually forgiven; I say, let it be considered, that these Things are so far from being a necessary Ingredient in the true Faith, that it doth not appear, from the Scriptures, that they are so much as required of us as a Duty at all, or that the not doing of them shall be imputed to us as a Sin.

The Reason why I say so, is this: All the Scripture-Promises of Forgiveness of Sin, and of eternal Life, thro' the Blood of Jesus Christ, are made unto Mankind under a Condition that they perform the Terms of the New Covenant which was then sealed by that Blood; between God and Man; which Terms, as we have said, are Faith, and Repentance. No Man therefore can, or ought, to apply these Promises to himself, that is, so as to think he hath a Right or Title to them, any farther than he can satisfy himself he hath performed those Conditions: Nay, it would be an unwarrantable, sinful Presumption in him, if he should offer it.

But now, if it be every Man's Duty, nay, or any Man's Duty, thus to apply the Promises to himself, and a Sin in him if he did not, then it must be supposed likewise that it was his Duty to believe that he hath performed the Conditions. But now, I desire any Man to shew me any Text of Scripture, where God hath commanded, that we should believe that we have performed the Conditions of the new Covenant, or declared it to

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be a Sin in us, if we cannot thus believe. Thus far God hath commanded us to believe; namely, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the World; and that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting Life: but he hath no-where commanded us to believe, that we are true Believers; and, consequently, that we shall not perish, but have everlasting Life. The Scripture requires us to believe, that all true Penitents shall have Remission of their Sins, thro' the Blood of Christ: But it no-where requires us to believe, that we are true Penitents, and that we shall have Remission of Sins. Lastly; The Scripture hath told us, That if our Faith be sincere, it shall be imputed to us for Righteousness, as *Abraham's* Faith was: but this is a quite different Thing from laying hold of Christ's Righteousness, and applying it to ourselves, and then calling it Faith so to do. Since now no Man is obliged, by the Law of God, to believe, or to be assured, that he hath Faith or Repentance, or hath performed the Conditions of the Gospel-Covenant, (as it is certain, no Man is, and, indeed, in many Cases, as Things stand with Men, it is a Matter really impossible they should be thus assured) it undeniably follows, that neither is any Man bound to make such an Application of the Promises of the Gospel to himself, as this Notion of Faith (that I am now speaking of) supposeth; and, if such an Application be not his Duty

Duty, then it is certain he may have true saving Faith without it.

But, may some say, ought not every Man, especially every good Man, to apply the Promises of the Gospel to himself in particular? Are they not to be the Support and the Comfort, and the Joy of his Life?

To this I answer these two things: In one Sense, every Man, both good and bad, ought to apply them to himself; and, in another Sense, every good Man may so apply them.

First; Every Man whatsoever ought to apply the Promises of the Gospel to himself, as they are Motives and Encouragements to spur him on to do his Duty; But then this Application is but to be conditional, that is, thus; He ought to look upon all the Promises as belonging to him, if he perform the Conditions of them; he ought verily to believe, that he, in particular, shall be a Sharer in all the Benefits that Christ hath purchased for his Church, supposing that he makes good the Terms on his Part required in the Covenant of Grace. This kind of Application of the Promises is necessary to be made by every Man, both good and bad; because it is necessary to the doing our Duty. Without such an Application, a Man would not be put upon using his Endeavours to attain the Things promised; and, consequently, the Promises of God would lose their End; they would not be Motives to Obedience.

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And thus far, I will readily grant, that to apply the Promises to ourselves, is of the Essence of Faith; and not to do it, is Unbelief: For, indeed, it is a flat denying our Assent to the Revelations of God. God saith, in general, Whosoever believeth, and repenteth, shall be saved. The Man, who refuseth to make this Application, must be supposed to contradict this; for he must be supposed to say, that he doth not believe that he himself should be saved, tho' he should believe and repent; which is flat Unbelief.

But now, the Persons I am treating of are no ways guilty of this Unbelief; for they do apply the Promises of the Gospel to themselves in particular, in that conditional Way we now talk of. They acknowledge and believe the Remission of Sins in general, and the Salvation purchased by Jesus Christ; and they believe likewise, that they in particular should have their Portion in those Benefits, if they did perform the Conditions. Thus far, then, they do apply the Promises to themselves; which is all that Faith obligeth them to do. But here they stick; they are in doubt whether they have performed these Conditions, whether their Faith and Repentance be such as God will accept. This is their Doubt; but this is no Unbelief in them: For, as I said, they ought not, they cannot, farther believe the Promises to belong to them, than they can satisfy themselves they have made good the Conditions.

But,

But, Secondly, besides this conditional Application of Promises, by way of Motive and Encouragement to do our Duty, which every Man, both good and bad, is bound to make to himself; a good Man may go farther; for he may make a positive, absolute Application of the Promises of Forgiveness and Salvation to himself, to his own unspeakable Comfort: That is, when he finds, by the holy Frame and Temper of his own Heart, and the Fruits of Piety in his Life and Conversation, that he hath the Qualifications of a true Disciple of Christ; he may speak Peace to himself, upon good Grounds, and assuredly believe, that the Promises of the Gospel do belong to him in particular: That his Sins are forgiven him; that he is actually in the Favour of God; and that, if he perseveres in that Course of Holiness in which he now walks, he shall at last attain everlasting Salvation.

But then it is to be remember'd, that these comfortable Reflections and Applications are not so much his Duty, as his Happiness; or, if you will, they are no otherwise his Duty, than as it is his Duty to contribute all he can to the making his Life as happy and as comfortable as he can; in this World.

The plain *English* is, these Things do not make any Part of the Conditions of the Gospel, but only of the Comfort of it; it is the Happiness of a Man, that he is able to make such a Judgment of the Sincerity of his own

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pious Endeavours, as to conclude from hence, that he is in God's Favour; and, so long as he makes such a Judgment, he will not fail to draw such a Conclusion, and much Comfort will he receive from it. But if, thro' Ignorance, or Mistake, or Melancholy, he be hinder'd from making such a Judgment of his own Qualifications, as to give him Confidence to believe that the Promises belong to him: This is rather his Infelicity, than his Sin; it is not want of Faith, but Weakness of Judgment. And, tho' he cannot with Assurance look upon the Promises as belonging to him in particular, so long as his Mind continues thus clouded; yet God Almighty, the Searcher of Hearts, knows that he hath a Right to them, and will effectually make them good, to the eternal Salvation of his Soul, if he continue faithful to the End.

But, Fourthly and lastly: Let it be farther considered, that this Assurance of our Salvation, or this Believing that our Sins are forgiven, or this applying Christ's Merits to ourselves, is no-where in Scripture called by the Name of Faith: Nor, on the other Side, are these Terms of Faith, and Believing, ever used in such a Sense, as can be reasonably interpreted to import these Things.

First, I say, That these Things are never, in Scripture, called by the Name of Faith: We meet, indeed, with those Things, often in the New Testament; but they are always styled by another Name than that of Faith. The
Apostle

Apostle mentions the Hope of Christians, and the full Assurance of Hope; and he mentions their joying in the Testimony of a good Conscience, their Peace and their Joy in believing. In a Word; We meet, in the New Testament, with several Expressions of the Confidence and Assurance that good Christians had, or might have, of the Favour of God, and the Forgiveness of their Sins. But these Things are no-where intimated to be the same Thing with their Faith, in proper speaking, but rather to be the Effects and Consequences of their Faith. Those Things are represented to be the comfortable Fruits of their Faith and Believing in Jesus Christ, and not to be Faith or Believing itself.

And certainly it must be thus: For what Grounds has any Man of Hope, or Assurance, that his Sins are forgiven him, or that the Benefits of Christ's Passion belong to him, other than this, that he is among the Number of those true Believers, to whom the Promises are made? And, if so, then his Hope, or his Assurance, is not the same Thing with his Faith, or his Believing; but something that is consequent from it, or bottom'd upon it.

But, farther, I say, These Terms of Faith, or Believing, are never used in that Sense in Scripture, in which the Persons, whose Case we are now upon, do take them. In Scripture we, indeed, often find mention made of Faith in Christ, for the Remission of our Sins: But nobody is to understand this of the Belief

Belief of the Forgiveness of a Man's own Sins in particular ; but of Belief in Jesus Christ, by whom only Remission of Sins is to be obtained. St. *Paul* saith in my Text, *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved* ; But his Meaning is not, Believe that Christ died for thee in particular, and thou shalt be saved ; But this, Believe, that Jesus Christ was sent by God to be the Saviour of the World, and become a Disciple of his, and then thou shalt be saved. Again, our Saviour saith, *Whoever believeth not, shall be damned*. But far be it from us to construe his Words on this Manner, that whosoever believeth not that he is one of those to whom the Promises of God do belong, shall be damned : But thus the Context will oblige us to expound them, that whosoever hath the Gospel preached to him, and doth not believe it, and enter into the Possession of it by Baptism, with sincere Resolutions to live according to it, such an one shall be damned.

Lastly ; It is said, that *Abraham* believed God, and it was accounted to him for Righteousness : But this is not to be understood as if *Abraham's* Faith was nothing but his Assurance of God's Favour, and his applying the Promises to himself ; and that this was counted to him for Righteousness. No, *Abraham's* Faith was quite a different Thing, as the Apostle all along describes it. His Faith consisted in believing stedfastly the Revelations of God to him to be true, how im-
pro-

probable soever the Matter of them seemed to Flesh and Blood: And, upon this Belief, quitting his Country, and Friends, and disposing himself to pay intire Obedience to the Commands of God, tho' they were never so seemingly severe. This was that Faith of his that was counted to him for Righteousness; that is, upon Account of which, God accepted him as a righteous Person. And this Faith of *Abraham's* is always, by the Apostle, represented as a Pattern of our Faith: The Copy that we are to write after, if we expect Acceptance of God.

By these several Things that I have now represented, you may easily perceive how different a Thing that, which many Persons among us call true Faith, and of the Want of which some good People do complain, is from the Faith of the Gospel, that Faith which Christ hath proposed as a Condition of our Salvation.

If any Man be not satisfied with all this, but will still contend that the principal Act of saving Faith, the very Life and Soul of it, doth consist in applying Christ's Merits to ourselves, in laying hold on his Righteousness, and making it our own; all the Answer that I can farther make, is this, That these are Phrases of Man's making, and are not to be found in the Book of God: but, if those that use them will tell us what they mean by them, we shall be able, from that Book, to give an Account how far they do belong

long to Faith, and how far they do not. If, by applying Christ's Merits to ourselves, and making his Righteousness ours; if, by these Phrases, they mean no more than this, that we are to expect to be saved through the Merits of Christ, by the Conformity of our Hearts and Lives to that Righteousness, which he prescribed to us, and of which, in his own Life, he gave us an Example; then, it is very certain, they give us a true Notion of Faith: And whosoever so believes, and so practises, hath true Faith. But if, by the Phrases of applying Christ's Merits, and laying hold on his Righteousness, they mean, a persuading ourselves that Christ's Merits are actually imputed to us, and that we are actually accounted righteous before God, because he was so; then we say positively, that this is no Part, no Act, no Office of that Faith, which the holy Scripture requires of Mankind, in order to Salvation. We say positively, that if this be Faith, very bad Men may be true Believers, and very good Men may be Infidels; and, consequently, that very bad Men may go to Heaven, and very good may be excluded out of it.

But what then is that true, lively, saving Faith, or Belief, which is so often spoken of, as the great Condition of Salvation? This is my second Inquiry upon this Head, and which I shall dispatch in a very few Words; because, indeed, I have much prevented myself in this Argument, by what has been said already.

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I do not know how it comes to pass, that this Business of Faith in Jesus Christ, which is on all hands acknowledged so necessary, is, by many, made so intricate a Business: Certain it is, to one that comes to the reading of the Scriptures with an unprejudiced Mind, there is nothing more easy or more obvious than the Notion of it.

To believe in Jesus Christ, or Faith in Jesus Christ, is, according to the whole Tenor of the New Testament, never more nor less, than to become his Disciples; to be so convinced in our own Minds, that he was sent from God to be the Saviour of the World, as to yield Assent to all that he taught, and to give up ourselves to be obedient to all that he commanded.

This is the whole Business of that Faith, of which some Men have made so great a Mystery. This is the whole Meaning of coming to Christ, of receiving Christ, of putting on Christ, of being in Jesus Christ, which the Scripture speaks of. And this likewise ought to be the Meaning of all those Phrases (if we will make Sense of them) which, tho' they be not Scripture Expressions, yet are commonly applied to this Matter; that is, of resting and relying upon Jesus Christ, of having an Interest in him, of laying hold upon him, and his Righteousness; and the like.

The whole of that, which we call saving or justifying faith, is comprized in these two Things: An hearty Assent of our Understanding to all that Jesus Christ and his Apostles delivered to Mankind, as the Will of God; and an hearty Consent of our Wills, following thereupon, to be govern'd by those Laws and Rules that are prescribed to us; Or (as others are pleased to word it) thus: To have a saving Faith in Jesus Christ, is to own or accept of him in all his Offices: To receive him as the great Prophet, that came to declare the Will of God to Mankind; and, under that Notion, to give a Belief to whatsoever he taught: To receive him as the great High-Priest, that was to make an Atonement for the Sins of the World; and, under that Notion to depend upon the Merits of his Sacrifice and Intercession for the Remission of our Sins, and all the other Benefits of his Passion: And, lastly, to receive him as the great King that God hath set over his Church; and, under that Notion, to resign up ourselves to be wholly disposed of and govern'd by him.

In a Word; To believe in Christ, is nothing else, but to believe the Gospel, and to set ourselves to live according to it: So to assent to the Truth of the Scriptures, as to be induced thereby seriously to apply our Minds to the denying Ungodliness, and worldly Lusts, and living righteously, soberly, and godlily in this present World. This, I say,
and

and nothing else, is the Notion of Faith in Christ, where-ever it is spoken of as the Condition of Salvation.

This is St. *Paul's* Faith made perfect by Love, by which, he saith, we are to be saved. And this is St. *James's* good Works, proceeding from a lively Faith, by which, he saith, we are to be justified. St. *Paul's* Faith, and St. *James's* good Works, are perfectly the same thing; to us, at least, who are already Christians.

To conclude: Whoever doth thus believe in Christ, as I have now represented, hath certainly true Faith, and all the Promises of God belong to him, how doubtful soever he be of his own State, or how little soever he can apply the Promises to himself. But, whosoever doth not thus believe, be otherwise his Confidence or Assurance in applying the Promises never so great, he hath not true Faith, but may prove a Hypocrite.

And this, I think, may be sufficient to give Satisfaction to the Persons whose Case I have been speaking to. As for the Doubts and Scruples, that are commonly raised about Repentance, those I shall consider another Time.

Consider what ye have heard, and the God of, &c.



S E R M O N V I I I .

M A T T. III. 8.

Bring forth therefore Fruits meet for Repentance.



FAITH and Repentance are the great, nay, I may say, the only Conditions required in the Gospel, in order to Salvation; and therefore, as it is of infinite Concernment to every one, to possess himself of these two Qualifications, so it must needs be a Matter of unspeakable Trouble, to all such as have any Care of their Salvation, to find themselves destitute of them.

And yet, such is the Infelicity of a great many, even good Persons, that, very often, they are apt to pass such a Judgment upon themselves: being ready to conclude, that they are in a State both of Unbelief and Impenitence; that they have neither true Faith, nor true Repentance.

As for the Grounds and Reasons of their Doubts concerning their Faith, I considered them

them in my last Discourse, wherein I gave an Account of saving, justifying Faith.

I now come to speak of the Doubts they are apt to entertain concerning the Truth and Sincerity of their Repentance; and for that Purpose I have chosen for my Text the Words I have now read unto you.

And here my Business shall be to explain the Doctrine of Repentance, as that neither *bad* Men may be encouraged to think they are true Penitents, when they are not; nor *good* Men discouraged from believing the Sincerity of their Repentance, notwithstanding the manifold Failures they apprehend in themselves, as to the Expressions of it.

You see I here speak of *Repentance*, not as of some single transient Act or Actions that are now and then to be performed by a Man, upon Occasion: Not only as it is a Man's first Passage, from a heathenish or a wicked Life to a christian Life; which is that we call a Man's *Conversion*, and in which Sense it is often taken in the New Testament.

But I consider it as an Habit, a permanent State of Life, a Disposition and Qualification of Mind and Manners, which a Man must possess himself of, and continue in, as long as he lives; otherwise he is not to expect the final Remission of his Sins. And hence it is that the *Good*, as well as the *Bad* among us, are taught in our *Publick Liturgy*, not only every Day to *confess our Sins*, but also every

The Eighth Sermon.

Day to pray to God to grant us true *Repentance*. Having premised this, I come to the Argument.

Bring forth therefore Fruits meet for Repentance.

These are St. *John Baptist's* Words to the *Pharisees* that came to his Baptism. And from them we may gather, what that *Repentance* is, that will be available for the Forgiveness of our Sins, and securing us from that *Wrath to come*, which he speaks of in the Verse before; namely, it must be such a Repentance as brings forth worthy Fruits: *Bring forth* (saith he) *Fruits meet for Repentance*; or, as the Words may be rendered, *Bring forth the worthy Fruits of Repentance*.

So that the Evangelical Repentance which we now treat of, consists of *Two Parts*, or is made up of *two Things*. The one *Inward* in our Minds, which is that we properly call *Repentance*, (*μετάνοια*) and that consists in such a Sense of our Sins, and Hatred of them, as makes us heartily sorrow for them, and resolve to commit them no more. And this the *Pharisees* were presumed to have, when they came to St. *John's* Baptism.

The other is *Outward*, and shews itself in our Lives, and that consists in the actual forsaking those Sins which we so resolved against. And this is that St. *John* here styles the *worthy Fruits of Repentance*, or *Fruits meet for Repentance*.

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This is certainly the Account which the Scripture every-where gives of that Repentance which God requires of us, in order to the Forgiveness of our Sins: Only with this slight Difference, that sometimes the inward *Contrition* has the Name of Repentance given to it; and the *Reformation* that follows thereupon, is called the *Fruits* of it, as here in my Text; at other times, the Reformation in our Lives is called by the Name of Repentance; and the inward Sorrow and Contrition is reckoned only as a Preparative or Disposition towards it; as when St. Paul tells us, 2 Cor. vii. 10. that *Godly Sorrow worketh Repentance.*

Well but, say some Persons among us, (who yet, as we have Reason to believe, are very good Christians) if this be the Notion of true Repentance, then are not we in the penitent State. For we have neither that Sorrow and Contrition for our Sins, which true Repentance requireth; nor do we bring forth the Fruits of Repentance, by reforming ourselves as to several particular Sins, which we have often begged Pardon for, and resolved against. These are the *Two Cases* which I shall now speak to; and I begin with the *First*.

They complain that they have not that Sorrow for their Sins, which is sufficient to denominate their Repentance true and sincere. They can think of their many Offences and Provocations with dry Eyes; and, even at

those Times when they set themselves to express Acts of Repentance, and to make Confession of their Sins in a more solemn Manner: Yet all this is done with so much Insensibility, and so little Compunction, that instead of *broken and contrite Hearts*, which is the Sacrifice that God delights in, they come to these Offices rather with hardened ones.

That which I say to this, is this: We are not to measure the Sincerity of our Contrition, by the sensible Expressions of Grief with which it is sometimes accompanied; nor to conclude that we are not sorry for our Sins as we ought to be, because we are not put into a Passion at the Remembrance of them.

It is very certain, a Man may have a true Sense of his Sins, and a hearty Contrition for them, and yet not be able to shed a Tear, even when he most devoutly sets himself to beg God Almighty's Forgiveness of them. And 'tis very certain on the other hand, that a Man may weep abundantly at some Seasons, when he seriously reflects upon the great Mis-carriages of his Life past, and yet not at all be truly penitent for them.

The Truth is, that Part of Repentance we are now speaking of, consists rather in a Hatred of our Sins, in a deep-rooted Aver-sion to them, than in any transient Passion of Grief, that we can work up ourselves to, upon the Remembrance of them.

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Whoever is so sensible of the infinite Evil of Sin, that he does from his Soul detest and abhor it; and thereupon resolve firmly against it, and uses hearty Prayers to God to subdue it in him, by the Power of his Holy Spirit, and puts out his whole Strength to resist the Temptations of it; such a Man is a true Penitent. This permanent Hatred of Sin, and Resolutions and Endeavour against it, is the Life and Soul of Repentance: And a passionate Grief or Sorrow doth no farther belong to it, than as it is an Expression of that Hatred, or a Means to produce those Resolutions and Endeavours, against it.

But it will be urged, Can any Man be truly said to hate his Sins, that is not sensibly grieved and troubled that he hath offended God?

To this I say, in the *Second* Place, Whoever is really affected with Hatred towards his Sins, can hardly avoid the being troubled and afflicted, whenever it is his Unhappiness to offend God in any Instance; nay, or when he seriously reflects upon his former Offences. But then, these *Two* Things are to be remembered.

First, That there may be an inward Grief or Affliction in the Mind, tho' the Man that feels it cannot express it in Tears, or other outward Passions. These are Things that depend wholly upon the Make and Constitution of a Man's Body, and not at all upon the Sense of his Mind. Some Persons are of

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such an easy, and flexible, and passionate Temper, that they can shed Tears upon very slight Occasions. Others, though they may have a more real and permanent Sorrow upon their Hearts, yet cannot evidence it in such Ways.

But then, *Secondly*, As to this Business of Sorrow for Sin, there is a great Consideration to be had of the Nearness or Distance of the Time, when the Sins we repent of were committed.

When a good Man, thro' his own Carelessness and Inadvertency, or through the Importunity of some strong Temptation, happens to do any thing contrary to his Duty, his Heart will presently smite him. As soon as ever he reflects upon the Action, he will be naturally apt to be displeased at himself. And upon his first Retirement, and Examination of his Conscience, he cannot avoid the expressing a great Sorrow and Compunction for his Sin, and humbly and earnestly addressing to the Throne of Grace for the obtaining Forgiveness of it. And indeed, if he be not thus sensibly concerned and afflicted, when the Action is fresh in his Memory, and upon his Conscience, it is an Argument that he has not that Hatred of Sin which he ought to have; and therefore has some Reason to suspect, whether he be in the State of Repentance.

But then, for Sins that have been committed a good while ago, the Consideration is quite

quite different. If a Man set himself to exercise Acts of Repentance for his Sins in general, or for some particular Sin that he formerly had been guilty of; in this Case it cannot be expected ordinarily, that his Grief should be so sensible, or express itself in so passionate a Manner: For indeed our Make and Constitution will not admit of it.

Such is the Contrivance of our Tempers, — that the Remembrance of a Thing at a Distance, though we do endeavour to impress it upon ourselves with all the Advantages we can, will hardly excite so great a Passion as the Thing itself did, when it was present. Time wears off the Violence, and the Impetuosity of the Passions; tho' yet the inward Sentiments and Inclinations of the Mind, as to those Things that caused the Passion, may be the same perpetually.

That which I intend by this Consideration, is this; that it is enough to testify the Sincerity of our Sorrow for Sin, if we be heartily troubled and afflicted, whenever we have newly committed any Sin against God: But if afterward that Trouble or Grief do wear off, and we cannot bring ourselves to be so lively affected with the Thing after some Distance of Time, as we were at first, it is no Argument against the Sincerity of our Repentance; supposing we continue in the same Hatred, and Abhorrence of the evil Action, and in the same Resolutions not to be guilty of it any more.

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But enough of this ; I proceed to the other Case I mentioned in the Business of Repentance, and which indeed has more Difficulty in it than that I have now spoken to. It is this :

We hear very good People often complain, that tho' they are truly sensible of several Sins they are guilty of, and are sorry for them, and do over and over again resolve against them ; nay, and daily put up hearty Prayers, that God would give them Grace to overcome them ; yet for all this, they frequently fall into them again ; nay, and perhaps every Day : Now, how can they be said to be true Penitents ; that live after this Rate ? Is it not an essential Part of true Repentance to forsake the Sin, as well as to be sorry for it, and to resolve against it ? But they do not forsake the Sins they resolve against ; and therefore they have just Reason to conclude, that they are far from having true Repentance.

This is the Case, and there is but one Way of coming to a Resolution of it, and that is by a particular Inquiry, what those Sins are which these Persons resolve against, and which they cannot or do not conquer.

It is very certain, that in general speaking, Repentance, as it is proposed as a Condition of Salvation in the Gospel, doth include in it a *forsaking* of Sin, as well as a *Hatred* of it, and a *Resolution* against it ;
and

and consequently, whosoever does not forsake his Sins, is not a true Penitent. Thus far they are right.

But then, on the other side, 'tis very certain likewise, that a Man may be truly said to forsake his Sins, in the Gospel-Sense of forsaking them, tho' yet, in the mean time, he be far from living without Sin: Nay, he may observe several Irregularities in his Actions, and be so sensible of them as to make Resolutions against them, and pray to God to preserve him from them; yea, and constantly strive to avoid them, and yet, now and then, thro' Inadvertency, or Surprise, or a great Temptation, be overtaken with them, and all this while be in the true State of Repentance. I say, both these Points are certainly true.

As for the First, That forsaking of Sin is necessary to Repentance, there can be no Doubt of it. The Scripture tells us, *Prov. xxviii. 13. That he only that confesseth and forsaketh his Sins shall find Mercy.* And *1 John iii. 9. They that are born of God, do not commit Sin.* And *Gal. v. 24. Those that are Christ's, have crucified the Flesh with the Affections and the Lusts.* And to live in Sin, or under the Power of Sin, is every-where by our Lord and his Apostles represented as a Thing perfectly inconsistent with the being a Child of God.

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But, on the other hand, that no Man (how truly a Penitent soever he be) doth live without Sin, is a Point every whit as plain from the Scripture as the former. St. *James* tells us, *That in many Things we offend all:* And St. *John*, *If we say that we have have no Sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us.* And many other Passages there are to this Purpose.

That therefore that makes the Difference between a true Penitent and a pretended one, as to this Matter, must be the Nature, and Kind, and Circumstances of the Sin that is left unmortify'd, or that the Man still lives under the Power of.

There are some Sins that do consist with a repentant State, and some Sins that do not. There are likewise several Circumstances of the same Sin that may difference or vary the State. It may happen, that the same Sin which in one Man is a *Weakness* or an *Ignorance*, and so consistent with the State of Repentance, will in another Man be a Sin of *Presumption*, and inconsistent with it. Concerning these Things therefore, a particular Inquiry is to be made, before Satisfaction can be given to those that doubt of the Sincerity of their Repentance.

But, first of all, before we come to speak of Sins that are consistent with a State of Repentance, and such as are inconsistent with it; it will be fit to ask those Persons whose Case we are speaking to, whether those Things
which

which they are most apt to complain of, as Sins which they cannot overcome; but notwithstanding their Resolutions and Prayers, do often fall into them; whether, I say, they be really Sins at all.

It is very certain, that many tender Consciences (but uninstructed) do often reflect on, and severely call themselves to Account for several Things, which God will never impute to them as Sins. Those that converse with this sort of Persons, will frequently find, that their greatest Complaints of unmortify'd Sins are made in such Instances as these: That they are out of Temper, when they come to their Devotions: That they are troubled with many foolish and wandering Thoughts, throughout their religious Exercises: Though they endeavour to keep their Minds in a constant Sense of God and good Things, and would always profitably employ their Thoughts; yet abundance of vain Imaginations do croud into their Heads, and render their Endeavours ineffectual. That they are often wearied with the Length of their spiritual Offices, and pray without Life and Vigour: And, in a Word, that they cannot govern their Minds, but in spite of all their Resolutions, abundance of impertinent, and sometimes undecent and sinful Fancies, do disturb and quite spoil their most serious Attempts to live a religious Life.

But now, if they would well consider, they would be convinced that these kind of Things

Things are not so much their *Sins*, as their *Imperfections*. They are the necessary Results of the Union of their Souls with earthly Bodies; and therefore can by no Means be called their Faults, so long as they do not willingly give way to them, but strive against them.

A Man may, every whit with as much Reason, accuse himself of Sin, when he cannot attend his worldly Business with the same Vigour and Application of Mind, that he doth at other Times, as he ought; when he does not pray and meditate upon spiritual Things so vigorously and intensely as at some times he doth, supposing he endeavour it.

The Truth is, neither of these Things is always in our Power, because they depend altogether upon the Temper of our Bodies, which we cannot oftentimes correct or alter: And what is not in a Man's *Power*, the not doing of it cannot be a *Sin*. There is this Essential to every Sin, that there must be something of the *Will* in it. Whatever a Man doth, or whatever a Man omits, if it be involuntary in him, if he cannot help it, it may be his *Imperfection*, but it is not his *Sin*.

And this will extend farther than to those Instances that I have now named. Even all the sudden Motions and Inclinations that Men do often find arising in themselves to that which is Evil, if they be not consented to, if they be not in the least indulged and encouraged,

raged, but heartily rejected and strove against; these, even these, will not prove Sins, but only Imperfections and Infelicities; which, if it be true, (as I see no Reason that any Man has to doubt of it) one great Part of those Things which the religiously Melancholy are apt to complain of, is by this quite struck off.

Well now, but as for these Things that are really Sins in them, let us inquire how far they are consistent, or inconsistent with the State of Repentance. Now the Resolution of this Inquiry will depend upon the Answers, to these three following Questions.

First of all, the general Question is this; Do they seriously and impartially set themselves against all Sins whatsoever? Do they harbour no Affection or Kindness for one Lust more than another, but use their hearty Endeavours to mortify all, and to conform themselves in all Things to the Laws of Jesus Christ? If they can say this of themselves, it is an evident Argument that their Repentance is true, though they may labour under many Frailties and Corruptions.

The Insincerity of a Man's Repentance is commonly discovered by this, that he is more sensible of some kind of Sins than he is of others, and is accordingly *partial* in his Endeavours to mortify them. Those Sins that are more conducing to his Interest, or to which he has more strong Temptations from his Temper

Temper and Inclination, or from his Company, or Circumstances of Living; these he has not the same Aversion to, nor takes that Pains to avoid, that he has and does with Respect to others, that do not recommend themselves to him upon those Accounts. This now is an undeniable Proof that the Man doth not hate Sin, purely for itself, or purely because it is displeasing to God, but because it is not so pleasing or profitable to himself. He hath not the Temptation to that Sin that he hath to others; and therefore he takes care not to be guilty of it: But, where a Man can satisfy his own Mind that he doth impartially lay out his Endeavour, for the subduing and destroying in himself every thing that God hath declared against in his Holy Gospel; and spares no evil Affection, how dear or how advantageous soever it may be to him in this World; but fights and strives as well against those Corruptions that are rooted in his Nature, and serve his worldly Ends, as those that he hath no such great Temptations to: Such a Man hath the undoubted Marks of a sincere Penitent, and may, in the Gospel-Sense, be truly said to have forsaken his Sins, and to keep God's Commandments, notwithstanding the many Slips and Failures that he may be even daily guilty of. But to come more particularly to the Point:

The *Second* Question to be asked is this: What kind of Sins are those that these Per-

sons complain they have not overcome, but notwithstanding their Prayers and Resolutions, they are often guilty of them? Are they such as may be called *presumptuous* Sins, or such as may be only called *Infirmities* and *Frailties*? Are they such as cannot be committed without Deliberation, and full Choice and Consent of the Will; or such as they may be surprized into thro' Inadvertency, or sudden Temptations? If they be of the former Sort, that is to say, wilful, deliberate Sins, it is certain they cannot stand with the State of Repentance. Either the Man that is guilty of them was not a good Man, or ceased to be so upon his committing them.

Of this kind are, *Murder, Adultery, Blasphemy, Perjury, Slander, Extortion, Cheating, Defrauding*, and the like. These Sins, and such like, are in themselves so very foul, and require so full a Consent of the Will to be guilty of them, (for let Men talk what they please, no Man was ever guilty of such Crimes as these, but he either had no Sense of Religion at all; or, if he had, he deliberately abandoned himself to Vice and Wickedness) that it cannot be conceived, how one single Act of them can be reconcileable with the State of Repentance: Either the Man was not a true Penitent when he fell into them, or he ceased to be so upon the committing of them.

But,

But, *Thirdly*, As there are some single Acts of Sin which are inconsistent with the State of Repentance, namely, *wilful, presumptuous* Sins; so likewise is every *Habit* of Sin inconsistent with it; I mean every Habit of known open Sin. And therefore these Persons are in the last Place to be asked, Whether the Sins they have not yet conquered be of that Nature or no?

If the Sins they complain of, consist in Actions known to be against the Laws of God, and they customarily continue in them, I dare not say, that they are yet in the State of Repentance. For, tho' perhaps every particular Act of such Sins that they are guilty of, may not be attended with those aggravating Circumstances, as to make it amount to one of those wilful, presumptuous Sins I before spoke of; yet if the Sins be habitual and customary, they will, I am afraid, fall under that Denomination.

But then these Persons are to be careful that they do not mistake that for a *known, open* Sin, which really is not so: Or a *Habit* of known Sin, for that which is not a *Habit*. I shall represent the Difference in these three following Particulars:

First of all, when we speak of known, open Sins, we mean such Sins as a Man is guilty of in his *Actions*. And therefore we make a Distinction between the inward Irregularities of the Mind, which consist in unlawful Desires, or disorderly Passions; and between

tween the outward Actions. Tho' the former be truly sinful, if in the least consented to; nay, and we ought seriously to endeavour to mortify them in ourselves as much as we can; yet if, thro' the Man's conscientious Care to suppress them, they do not proceed to Overt-Acts, they are not such known open Sins as we here speak of.

Thus, for Instance; A Man that is rashly and intemperately angry upon any Occasion, this very Passion is a Sin in him, and he ought to ask God Forgiveness for it: But, so long as he doth so stifle this Passion, and that out of a Sense of Religion, as not to suffer it to break out into unchristian Railings and Revilings; nor is he transported thereby to do any Action in pursuance of it, that the Laws of Jesus Christ have forbid: I say, this Man, notwithstanding the Sins of his Thoughts may yet be said to be free from those known, open Sins, which, if they be habitual, are inconsistent with Virtue.

But, on the other hand, where we see a Person to have no Government of his Passion, but, upon every slight Occasion, to break out into a violent Rage, and in that Rage to say and do all those provoking Things that his present Fury can suggest to him: Here is now a Man that is not only guilty of a known Sin, but it hath so much Dominion over him, that he may be said to live in it; and consequently, he is not yet in the State of Repentance.

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I instance in this Particular of *Wrath* and *Anger*, both because it is a Sin that so ordinarily happens in the Course of our Lives; and because that even the very worst Expressions of it are generally accounted but our Weaknesses and Infirmities; whereas certainly they are downright Works of the Flesh, known Sins against the Law of God, and such as, if they be continued in, if they be habitual, are destructive of Salvation.

Secondly, In order to the giving an Account of known, open Sins, as we must distinguish between the Sins of the *Thoughts*, and the Sins of the *Actions*; so likewise, as to the Sins of our Actions, we must further distinguish between those of them that consist in *Omission*, or not doing the Things that the Law of God hath commanded us; and those that consist in *Commission*, or doing such Things as the Law of God hath forbidden us. Now it is the latter sort of Sins we here speak of, and of which we say, if they be habitual, they cannot consist with the State of Repentance.

As for Sins of *Omission*, very good Men may be guilty of them; nay, and in many Instances, and that habitually too. Nay, perhaps I may say, the best Men cannot clear themselves as to this sort of Sin; for I believe all Men fall short of doing that Good they are bound to do.

But, as for Sins of *Commission*, the Thing is otherwise; good Men do usually avoid them,

them, but to be sure they do not make a Trade or Custom of them; or, if they do, I doubt they are not good Men, or sincere Penitents. For I take it, whoever in his Conversation or Actions, ordinarily or customarily, practiseth any Thing that is expressly forbidden by the Laws of God; such an one cannot be said to have *mortified the Deeds of the Body*, and to have *put off the Works of the Flesh*; which yet in the New Testament is every-where made the Character of one that is in the regenerate, penitent State.

To give an Instance of this: The Sin of *Swearing* in our Conversation, or the Sin of *Lying*, or the Sin of *filthy* and *lascivious Talking* (I instance in these Sins, because some People may took upon them to be very light and inconsiderable, as not having in them that Mischief and Malignity, which is discoverable in other Crimes; yet I say, these Sins) being so expressly forbid by the Laws of our Lord Jesus Christ; and being likewise Sins in the outward Actions, and consequently certainly in our Power to avoid them, so that we cannot plead either Ignorance or Infirmary for them: I say, whosoever lives in the Practice of these Sins, cannot reasonably be thought to be in the State of Repentance, because he cannot be presumed to make any Conscience of Transgressing the express Laws of our Saviour.

Well, but are not Sins of *Omission* also Transgressions against the Laws of God? I

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answer, they must be so, if they be Sins. But then there is this Difference, that in the Duties which God has commanded us to do, we are often left in such a Latitude as to *Time*, and *Place*, and *Manner*, and other Circumstances, that no Man can say, you are bound to do such an Action, just at such a Time, and in such a Manner, otherwise you sin against God. So that if a Man thro' Mistake or Inadvertency do omit an Action that he ought to have done; why, in that Case, when he comes to see his Mistake, or find his Carelessness, he will be sorry for it, and ask Pardon of God for his Omission of the Duty: But yet this Omission will amount to no more than a Sin of Weakness or Infirmary; which, we have said all along, is very consistent with the State of a good Man.

But now, where God hath *forbid* any Action to be done, the Case is quite different. For in that Case every body knows, that that Action is at all Times, and in all Places, and in all Circumstances unlawful to be done by him: So that no body needs to be put to deliberate whether he should do it or no; for every body knows he ought not to do it. And if after this a Man will venture to do such an Action which he knows to be thus forbidden by God; sure he contracts a greater Guilt than he would do, by the Omission of a Duty, as to the Timing of which no Law of God hath determined him.

But

But now, notwithstanding this Difference I make between Sins of Omission and Sins of Commission, I must yet own that there may be such Instances and such Degrees of Sins of *Omission*, as, if Care be not taken that they be amended, will prove as fatal to the Man that is guilty of them, as if he lived in a Course of open, known Sins of *Commission*.

As for Example; What shall we say of a Man that never joins in the publick Worship of God, or that never receives the Sacrament, or that never says his Prayers, or confesseth his Sins, or useth any Devotion, either in his Family, or in his Closet? Or lastly, What shall we say of a Man that is blessed with plentiful Circumstances in the World, and yet gives little or nothing away in Charity? Why, all these are but Omissions of our Duty; but yet they are such Omissions as whoever continues in them, is never like to go to Heaven. Nay, how damnable this last Omission I named, is, you may see in the 25th Chapter of *St. Matthew*, where our Saviour passeth the Sentence of Condemnation on *the Goats on his left Hand*, for no other Reason but purely for the not exercising Works of *Charity* towards their Brethren, according to their Abilities and Opportunities.

But now, such sorts of Omissions as these, are quite out of the Case I am speaking to. For I have here to do with Persons that

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have really a hearty Sense of Religion upon their Minds; and therefore to be sure can never be guilty of such gross, wilful, criminal Omissions, as I have now mentioned. And that which they desire to be satisfied in, is not how far they may neglect their Duty; but, after they have done all they can towards the Performance of it, whether they have yet so forsaken their Sins, as to be in a State of Repentance? Now as to that, I say, so long as they do not live in known Sins of Commission, the Omissions they may be frequently guilty of, will not, I hope, hinder them from being true Penitents, and in a State of Salvation.

But, *Thirdly* and *Lastly*, Besides what we have said about known open Sins, we must also, in order to the Resolution of the Question before us, consider another Thing, and that is, Whether they be *habitual* or no. And for the finding of that, we must have regard to the *Frequency*, or *Infrequency* of them. Every Act of Sin does not make a Habit; and a known Sin may be more than once committed, and yet not be customary.

If a Man do sincerely endeavour to mortify or to forsake his known, open Sins, tho' he does not leave them at once, and for altogether, yet if he gains Ground of them, and commits them seldomer and seldomer; even such a Man may be said to have entered into the State of Repentance. And tho' he has not attained to that Strength and Perfection

tion which the Gospel proposes, and which, if he continue his Endeavours, there is no Doubt but he will arrive to; yet in the mean time, he is in a very good Way. And, if he should die before his Work be accomplished, yet, having the true Seeds and Principles of Regeneration or Repentance in him, I should not doubt but God would accept him as a sincere Penitent, and receive him to his Mercy.

These are the Things that I had to represent, in order to the answering this Question, *What sort of forsaking Sins is necessary to true Repentance*; and which every Man is to examine himself about, if he would upon good Grounds satisfy himself, whether the Sins he is guilty of in the Course of his Life be consistent with it, or no.

The Sum of all that I have said upon this Head, is this: If a Man upon such an Examination can satisfy himself as to these following Particulars; namely.

First, That he doth in the Course of his Life, sincerely apply his Mind and Endeavours to mortify every evil Affection, and to live in an uniform Obedience to all God's Commandments:

And, *Secondly*, That the Sins he is guilty of, are not gross, wilful, deliberate Crimes; but rather the Effects of Inconsideration, or Surprise, or a sudden Temptation:

And, *Thirdly*, That they do more consist in the Irregularities of the Desires and Ap-

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petites, and Passions of his Mind, than in the customary Gratification of those Appetites and Passions in his Actions :

And, *Fourthly*, That they are mostly Matters of Omission of his Duty, and not so much expressed in Instances forbidden by God's Laws :

And *Lastly*, That of what Nature soever they be, tho' he has not actually subdued them, and got the Victory over them, yet he gains Ground upon them, and doth not so frequently repeat them ; and when he doth, it is in smaller Instances, and upon greater Temptations, and with less Interruptions of his religious Course :

I say, whosoever can satisfy himself that the Sins he is most frequently guilty of in the Course of his Life, are of this Nature, and fall under these Circumstances ; such a Person needs not in the least doubt but that for all them, he is in the State of Repentance, and shall find Mercy with his heavenly Father.

God Almighty grant to us all true Repentance, and his Holy Spirit, that the rest of our Life hereafter may be pure and holy, so that at the last we may come to his eternal Joy, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord : To whom, &c.

SERMON



S E R M O N IX.

H E B. X. 26, 27.

For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries.



HAVING already spoken to several Points, which thro' their being not well understood, have much increased, if not caused Affliction of a great many good Christians, such as are troubled in Mind upon a religious Account; I shall now proceed to another Head of Things, which is often the Occasion of much Trouble and Perplexity to those Persons who are under the Power of this sort of Melancholy.

And that is, their misunderstanding two or three Texts of Scripture, which speak of a sort of Sins for which there seems to be no Repentance allowed, and which shall never be forgiven to the Man that is guilty of them;

them; which Sins yet they are often miserably afraid that they themselves have committed.

These Sins are, *First*, The wilful Sin, spoken of by *St. Paul*, in the Words I have now read unto you, for which he says there remains no more Satisfaction, but a fearful Expectation of Judgment, and fiery Indignation.

Secondly, The Sin unto Death, spoken of by *St. John*, as to which he seems to say, we ought not so much as to pray for the Person that is guilty of it.

And *Thirdly*, The Sin against the Holy Ghost, spoken of by our Saviour; which he saith, *shall never be forgiven in this World, nor in the World to come.* Of these three Texts therefore, and the Sins therein spoken of, I shall now give an Account. And I begin with the First of them, to which I shall confine myself at this time.

It is no Wonder that this Text is so apt to fright weak Persons; for indeed it seems to declare so severely against all sorts of Men, that either are, or have been wilful Sinners after Baptism, (as God knows the greatest part of Christian Professors have been) as to leave little Hopes of the Forgiveness and Favour of God Almighty, even after their best Repentance.

But I doubt not to give such an Account of this Text, as will satisfy the most scrupulous Person in this Matter. And, in order there-

thereunto, I shall inquire into these four Things.

First of all, in general, What it is to sin wilfully, or what is the Notion of a wilful Sin.

Secondly, Whether the Apostle in this Text speaks of all wilful Sins whatsoever, or only of some one particular kind of wilful Sins.

Thirdly, What that particular kind of wilful Sin is.

And *Fourthly*, In what Sense he affirms that there remains no more Satisfaction for such Sin, but a fearful Expectation of Judgment.

An Account of these four Things is all that can be thought needful for the clearing this Text.

And First of all, I begin with the general Notion of wilful Sin.

We all of us know that Sins are commonly distinguished by Divines into three Sorts; Sins of Ignorance, Sins of Infirmary, and Sins of Wilfulness. The Ground of this Distinction is laid in the Soul of Man, in which are three distinct prime Faculties, or Powers, from which all our Actions flow, that is to say, the Understanding, the Will, and the sensual Appetite or Affections. Now, when we do any sinful Action, that Faculty of these three gives Denomination to the Sin, from whose Fault, or Irregularity, or Disorder the Action doth chiefly proceed; I say, doth chiefly proceed; for it cannot be denied, that
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in every Sin a Man commits, all the three Faculties do in some Degree or other concur to it. Take the Explication of this in the Words of that accurate Casuist Bishop *Sanderfon*.

If the Understanding be most in Fault, not apprehending its Duty, or not apprehending it aright; the Sin so committed, tho' possibly it might have in it somewhat both of Infirmary and Wilfulness withal, yet it is properly a Sin of Ignorance. And such was St. *Paul's* persecuting the Church; it was his want of Understanding, it was the Erroneousness of his Judgment that mainly misled him, and not any Malice in his Will, or Corruption in his Affections, upon which Account he himself calls this Action of his, a Sin of Ignorance. But, *Secondly*, If the main Fault be in the Affections, thro' some sudden Passion and Perturbance of Mind, either blinding, or corrupting, or out-running the Judgment, (as for Instance, Fear, Anger, Desire, or the like) the Sin arising from hence, tho' perhaps joined with some Ignorance, and Wilfulness withal, yet is properly a Sin of Infirmary. And such was *Peter's* denying of our Saviour: In which Action his Understanding was not in fault; for he knew very well both whom he denied, and he knew likewise that he ought not to have denied him: Nor was the Fault so much in his Will, as to make it properly a wilful Sin; for he did not deny our Saviour out of Malice or Design;

Design; nay, he came thither with a Resolution not to do it. And he still honoured him in his Heart, even then when he denied him with his Tongue. And when the Crowing of the Cock brought him to consider what he had done, *he went out and wept bitterly.* But the Failure was in his Affections; it was the Fear that surprized his Soul, when he saw his Master so despitefully used before his Face, which made him apprehensive of what hard Usage himself might meet with, if he should then and there have owned him. I say it was that Fear that for that Time deprived him of the Benefits and Use of his Reason, and made him think of nothing but how to avoid the present Danger; and this thus proceeding from such a sudden Distemper of Passion, St. Peter's Denial was a Sin properly of Infirmary.

But, *Thirdly*, If the Understanding be competently informed with Knowledge, and not much blinded or transported with the Percussion of any violent sudden Passion or other Perturbance, so that the greatest Blame must remain upon the Untowardness of the Will, resolutely bent upon the evil Action; the Sin arising from hence, tho' probably not free from all Mixture of Ignorance and Infirmary withal, is yet properly a wilful Sin; or, as the Scripture commonly expresseth it, a Sin of Presumption; and such, for Instance, was the Sin of *David*, in contriving the Death of *Uriah*. For this he could never pretend Ignorance,

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norance, nor the sudden Transport of a Passion. He knew the Greatness of the Crime, and he had Time and Leisure enough to bethink himself what he was about. He did the Fact with Deliberation, there was the full Consent of his own Will to it; in regard of which, it was justly to be styled a wilful presumptuous Sin.

From what has been said, we may in some measure discover, what a wilful Sin is, and how it is distinguished from Sins of Ignorance and Infirmities. Take the Sum of it in the Words of the foresaid Author: "When a
 " Man, sufficiently convinced in his Under-
 " standing, that the Thing he would do is
 " unlawful and displeasing to God; or, at
 " least, hath sufficient Means so to convince
 " him, if he be not wilfully wanting to him-
 " self in the Use thereof; and then besides,
 " hath Time and Leisure to advise with
 " himself, to examine the Case, and every
 " Circumstance of it, and to apply the Light
 " that is in his Understanding thereunto; and
 " yet, when all is done, (contrary to the Dic-
 " tates of his own Reason, and the Checks of
 " his own Conscience) goes on to put his
 " wicked Intentions into Act, and to fulfil
 " his own Will, notwithstanding the ap-
 " parent Inconformity thereof to the Will
 " of God:" This is a wilful Sin.

Having thus given the Notion of wilful and presumptuous Sins in general, I come to apply it to the Text, which is the second Thing I have to do.

And

And here the Inquiry is, whether, when the Apostle says, *That if we sin wilfully after we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Satisfaction for Sin*; Whether, I say, his Proposition is to be understood of all wilful Sins committed after Baptism, and the taking Christianity upon us; or whether he speaks only of one particular kind of wilful Sins.

Now, in Answer to this, I say, that certainly the Apostle's Proposition is not to be extended to all willful Sins committed after Baptism, but to be restrained to one sort of them; and my first Reason for this is, that otherwise this Assertion of his cannot be reconciled with abundance of plain Texts both in the Old and New Testament.

We own indeed, that whosoever lives in any Course of known wilful Sin, cannot, so long as he so lives, hope for the Favour of God, or be presumed to be in a State of Salvation. Nay, it cannot be denied also, that there are many single Acts of Sin, tho' they be at once committed, that have so much of Wilfulness and Presumption in them, that they put a Man out of the State of Grace, and destroy his Salvation, without a particular Repentance; but, notwithstanding all this, the Scripture teacheth us, that both for such Acts, and such Habits of Sin, there still remains a Sacrifice. The Door is still open to the Sinners, they are still under the Covenant of Grace. God both calls upon them
to

to repent, and offers them Grace to do it and will, without doubt, accept them, if they close with it. This, we say, is the constant Doctrine, both of the Old and New Testament.

As for the Old Testament, how frequently do we there find God Almighty, by his Prophets, calling, and exhorting, and inviting even wilful and obstinate Sinners to Repentance, and promising them Pardon and Acceptance, if they would turn to him, and leave their evil Ways? And such Sinners they were too, as were not Heathens, but lapsed Professors, such as were under his Covenant, and had sinned after they had received the Knowledge of the Truth, as our Text expresseth it.

God, in *Ezekiel*, professeth over and over again, that he had no Pleasure in the Death of a Sinner, but rather that he should turn from his evil Ways, and live; and declares universally to all Sinners, that, *Whenever a wicked Man will turn from his Wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his Soul alive, Ezekiel xviii. 27.*

And thus every-where do the Prophets encourage the revolting backsliding *Israelites* to return to their Duty, assuring them of Pardon upon their so doing; and many Instances and Examples likewise we have of those that have found Mercy from God, after their falling into sinful and grievous Crimes. As *David*

vid, after his Commission of Murder and Adultery; *Solomon*, after a Course of Debauchery and Idolatry; *Manasses*, after a long Life of horrid Impieties. Nor, sure, are the Gates of Repentance and Mercy more shut to backsliding Sinners, in the New Testament, than in the Old; under the Gospel, than under the Law. When *St. Peter* asked our Saviour, how often he should forgive his Brother that sinned against him, whether he should do it seven times; our Saviour's Answer was, *I say not unto thee, seven times, but seventy times seven, if thy Brother so often sin against thee.* Now, certainly, we may expect the same Mercy from God, in case we sin against Him, that he hath commanded us to shew to our fellow Creatures, in case of their Trespases against us; especially since he hath declared, that our Dealings towards our Brother shall be the Measure of his Dealings towards us.

But farther: What Kindness our Saviour bears to the Souls even of those that have fallen from their Duty, after they have come to the Knowledge of it; what Means he useth to bring them to Repentance, and how ready he is to pardon them if they do repent, doth sufficiently appear from the Parable of the Prodigal Son, whom, after all his riotous living, nay, after he had wholly consumed that Portion that was given him upon Harlots, his Father yet, upon his Return, received to Favour, with all imaginable Ex-

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pressions of Joy, even to the discontenting his other Son, who had never displeased him.

And yet more plainly it appears, from the other Parable of the Man, that having a hundred Sheep, upon the straying of one of them, leaves the ninety and nine, and goes after that which was lost, until he finds it; and when he has found it, he lays it on his Shoulder, rejoicing, and calls his Friends and Neighbours also together to rejoice with him. Which Parable our Saviour himself thus applies, *Verily, saith he, Joy shall be in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just Persons that need no Repentance.*

If any one will say, That these Encouragements are given to Sinners, only upon their first coming to Christ, and taking his Religion upon them, and are not to be extended to those that fall or sin wilfully after Baptism; I answer, That such an Interpretation seems to do much Violence to the Parable. For it is to be observed, that the Prodigal, spoken of in the first Parable, is not a Stranger, but a Son; is already in the nearest Relation to him, that expressed so much Joy for his Return; not an Enemy, or an Alien. And so likewise in the other Parable: The Sheep that goes astray, and about whom the Householder is so much concerned, is not a Sheep without an Owner, but one of his own Sheep: One that fed in the same Pasture

sture with the rest of his Flock; and, indeed, otherwise he could in no Sense be called his lost Sheep. So that, if we will preserve the Decorum of the Parable, it is necessary that we expound this Prodigal, and this lost Sheep, of these Persons, that, after they are made the Sons of God by Regeneration of Water, and of the Spirit, after they are admitted as Sheep into the Fold of our great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, do abuse God's Grace, and abandon themselves to evil Courses, contrary to the Profession they have undertaken.

But, *Secondly*, That this Text we are upon, doth not speak of all wilful Sins, committed after Baptism, or the Profession of Christianity, we have this farther Argument; namely, That the sinning wilfully, here spoken of, must be meant only of such Sins, as whoever commits, doth, by that Action, tread under foot the Son of God, and count the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy Thing, and doth Despite to the Spirit of Grace. These are the very Words by which *St. Paul*, in the Verse immediately following, describes the wilful Sin he here speaks of.

But now, it will be hard to affirm, (nay, I hope it would be untrue, if it was affirmed) that any Act of wilful Sin, nay, or any Habit of Vice, that Christian Professors are generally or ordinarily guilty of, can fall under this Imputation, or be charged with so high a Degree of Guilt, as these Expressions seem

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to fix upon the wilful Sin here spoken of: That is to say; 'Tho' the Lives of Christian Professors be often bad enough, and the Sins that they live in be so grievous in themselves, and wilful as to them, that, without Repentance, they are in a dangerous and damnable Condition; yet it is to be hoped, that neither the Sins are in their own Nature so heinous, nor the Will and Mind, with which they are committed, so malicious, that those that commit them, or live in them, can properly be said thereby to tread under foot the Son of God, or to do Despite to the Spirit of Grace.

From these Things put together, I hope we may warrantably conclude, that it is not of all wilful Sins; promiscuously and indiscriminately, that St. *Paul* here speaks, when he saith, *There remains no more Sacrifice for such*; but only one particular kind of wilful Sins. Now what that is, I come, in the Third Place, to inquire.

In this Inquiry, I shall not trouble you with the several Opinions of Divines, concerning this wilful Sin; but I shall briefly declare what seems to be the true Account of it, and the Reasons that do incline me to believe so.

I affirm therefore, That the Sin the Apostle here speaks of, is no other than an Apostasy from the Faith of Christ; a renouncing of our Christianity. And by sinning wilfully, he means, a wilful Apostasy from the Faith
of

of Christ, a renouncing Christianity, not thro' some sudden Surprize, or Fear, or the like, and then returning to the Profession of it again; but a set, continued, obstinate Desertion of it, and going over to the Enemy's Party; that is, revolting either to Judaism or Heathenism, and becoming the Adversaries of Christ, and his Religion. That this is the true and only Account of this Sin, will appear from these two following Things:

First of all; The Occasion upon which these Words come in, doth lead us to this Sense: We find by this Term *for*, that is set before them, that they are designed as a Reason, or Argument, to inforce something that was said before. That that goes before, is this Exhortation, (*ver. 23, 25.*) *Let us hold the Profession of our Faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the Manner of some is, but exhorting one another.* What now follows? Why, the Words of my Text; *For, if we sin wilfully, after we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a fearful looking for of Judgment.*

It is plain here, that the Apostle's Design is to persuade the Jewish Christians to Perseverance in their Religion, notwithstanding all the Persecutions that threatened them upon account thereof, and to caution them against the forsaking of Christian Assemblies, and going over to the Jews, or Heathens, as

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ome of them had already done. It is plain likewise, that the Argument, wherewith he would enforce this Exhortation, and deter them from this Apostasy, is this Consideration of my Text, *That there remaineth no more Sacrifice for their Sin*, if they were guilty of it, *but only a fearful Expectation of Judgment*. If therefore we will suppose the Apostle to argue, as other Men do, that is to say, that the Motive or Reason he offers shall have any Relation to his foregoing Exhortation, we must conclude, that the wilful Sin he mentions, and for which, he saith, there remaineth no more Sacrifice, must be the Sin from which he was now dissuading them; namely, the renouncing of their Faith, or the forsaking the Christian Assembly: The frequenting of which was indeed the only Evidence they could give of their being Christians.

But, *Secondly*; The Argument wherewith the Apostle doth, in the following Words, endeavour to strengthen his Assertion in the Text, doth also add a farther Probability to this Exposition: *Whosoever* (saith he) *despised Moses's Law, died without Mercy, under two or three Witnesses. Of how much sorer Punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy Thing, and done Despite to the Spirit of Grace?*

Now

Now the Despisers of *Moses's* Law, here spoken of, as appears from *Deut. xvii. 3.* from whence the Apostle takes this Quotation, were those that renounced the Covenant of *Moses*, into which they were enter'd, and went over to the Idolaters, to worship the Sun, and Moon, and Stars. In all Reason therefore, the wilful Sinners, who are here compared with them, must be supposed Sinners of the same Nature; that is to say, Apostates from Christianity, as the others were from Judaism; otherwise the Apostle's Discourse will not proceed naturally and coherently. But, if we thus understand these Words, the Argument will be close and strong, and the Apostle will speak to this Effect:

Wonder not that I tell you, there is no Sacrifice remaining for those that apostatize from Christianity; for, even under the Law of *Moses*, there was none allowed for that Crime: Whoever wilfully deserted his Religion, was, under that Dispensation, to die without Mercy; and therefore, surely, much greater Punishment doth he deserve, that deserts his Religion now, that abandons his Christianity, and turns an Enemy to it, nay, it may be, a Persecutor of it. For, in thus doing, he treads under foot the Son of God: He despiseth and blasphemes Him, who was infinitely greater than *Moses* was: He counts the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy Thing; that is,

he profanes, he vilifies, he sets at nought that Blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for procuring the New Covenant, which yet was of infinitely greater Value than the Blood of Bulls and Goats, by which the Jews were enter'd into the Mosaical Covenant. And, Lastly ; He doth Despite to the Spirit of Grace ; that is, he puts an high Affront and Indignity upon the Holy Spirit, which is now by God plentifully poured forth upon the Christians, and by whom greater Miracles were daily wrought, for the Confirmation of Christ's Religion, than ever were wrought by *Moses*, for the Proof of the Jewish. And thus much of the Third general Point, what particular Sin that is, which is here called sinning wilfully, after we have received the Knowledge of the Truth.

The Fourth and Last Thing to be inquired into, is, What the Apostle means, when he says, *That to those that sin wilfully, after they have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a fearful Expectation of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, to consume the Adversary.* Now, in Answer to this, I say, first of all, That these Words do not imply, that the wilful Sin, here spoken of, is unpardonable ; or, that those that are guilty of it, are out of all Possibility of obtaining Forgiveness for it ; for here is nothing in these Words, from whence we can draw such a Conclusion. If indeed it had been said, *That*
to

to those that sin wilfully, there remains no Sacrifice for Sin, there might have been some Grounds for such an Inference; but it is only said, That to such there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin; that is to say, they are not to expect another Christ to die for them: But, for all that, for any thing that is here said, they may, upon Repentance, yet have the Benefit of that Sacrifice which was offered once for all for the Sins of the whole World. There is no one Sin in the World, no, nor any Habit of Sin, of so damning a Nature, but that, upon Repentance, and Change of Life, the Sinner may hope for Pardon and Acceptance; supposing the Man to be but in a Capacity of repenting, we may affirm, that his Sin is in a Capacity of being forgiven. In the second Place therefore; That which these Words do first and principally import, is the Sadness and Horridness of the present Condition, into which all that sin wilfully (that is, renounce their Christianity) do reduce themselves. For hereby they have forfeited all their Right and Title to the Benefits of the Gospel-Covenant; that is to say, the Pardon of their Sins, and the Promise of eternal Life; for there is but one Sacrifice, (that is, the Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross) by which Pardon of Sin is to be attained, and, consequently, eternal Life is to be hoped for. But this Sacrifice they have utterly disclaimed and rejected; nay, instead of owning it for a Sacrifice, they have counted

counted it an unholy Thing; looking upon the Death of Christ as a Punishment due to him, as an Impostor. What therefore can they now expect? Do they look for farther Sacrifice? No; it is not in the Christian Dispensation, as it was in the Mosaick, wherein the Priests offered the same Sacrifice every Year, for several Sins that were committed. After we have once renounced our great Sacrifice, there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin: Christ is not to offer himself any more. If we be saved at all, it is by his once offering up himself. If we reject that, there is nothing left, but a fearful Expectation of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, to consume the Adversary.

This seems to be the true and natural Paraphrase upon the Text. But then, Thirdly and Lastly; Besides the great Guilt of renouncing Christianity that is here expressed, and the dreadful Condition into which Men bring themselves thereby, there is this also farther implied in the Text, namely, the extreme Difficulty, and the moral Impossibility, of recovering such Persons out of that sad Condition. For this Sin is of such a Nature, that it utterly indisposeth Men, and rendreth them incapable of making use of the Means, by which a Pardon is to be obtained. Whatever other Sin a Man commits, yet, so long as he holds the Profession of his Faith without wavering, there may be some good Hopes of him; he hold to the Means of Salvation,
and

and may, in good Time, make use of them, and be restored again, by God's Grace, to that State of Repentance from whence he is fallen. But when a Man renounceth his Christianity; tho' we dare not say it is absolutely impossible for him to be retrieved and recovered to his sound Mind again, yet it is a Thing hardly to be expected, because it is the Nature of his Sin to render the very Means of his Recovery insignificant and ineffectual. It is the greatest Part of his Disease, to refuse the Cure. There is no Means of Salvation but one, and that is, by Christ; and that he disclaims and renounces. Truly therefore may the Apostle say of such an Apostate, that, as there remains no more Sacrifice for him, so, morally speaking, and as it ordinarily comes to pass, there is nothing left, but a fearful Expectation of Judgment, and a fiery Indignation, to consume him. And this indeed is the same Thing that the Apostle teacheth us, in another Passage of this Epistle, namely, that in the sixth Chapter, Verses 4, 5, 6. Which Passage, as it fully confirms all that I have said before, about the wilful Sin mentioned in my Text; so, by what I have already said, a clear Light is given to that Passage: *It is impossible* (saith the Apostle there) *for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come,*
(all

(all which Expressions are but a larger Description of a Christian, or a regenerate Person, or, as our Text phraseth it, of one that hath received the Knowledge of the Truth) *if such as these* (saith he) *shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them to Repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to open Shame.* The falling away here, is certainly the same thing with sinning wilfully in my Text; that is to say, a wilful Departure from Christianity. Now of those that do thus apostatize, St. Paul affirms, that it is impossible to renew them to Repentance. He certainly doth not mean an absolute Impossibility, but a moral one; in the same Sense that our Saviour saith, *That it is impossible for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, as another Evangelist explains it, *It is hard for a rich Man, &c.* In the same Sense that it is affirmed to be impossible for them to do Good, that have accustomed themselves to do Evil; that is to say, it is extremely difficult; it is not a Thing that either ordinarily happens, or can be easily effected. It is true, God may, by an extraordinary Providence, pluck such an Apostate out of the Fire; rescue him by a strong Hand from that desperate Vassalage to the Devil, in which he is held; but he hath nowhere promised that he will: nay, he hath threatened that he will not. However, of all Men living, it is the least to be hoped of

of such a Person, that God will shew such extraordinary Mercy to him, since he hath wilfully put himself out of that State of Salvation, which God, by Christ, had brought him into; and not only so, but hath abandoned and renounced all the Means by which only he can be recovered.

Thus have I given you a large, and, I hope, a plain Account of this difficult Text: And, you see, there is nothing in it that needs to create any Trouble or Affrightment to any well-disposed People among us, however they may have been guilty of many wilful Sins since their Baptism, or since their coming to the Knowledge of the Truth. Nay, you see, there is nothing in it that should make the greatest Sinner among us to despair of God's Mercy, if they have but the Heart to repent; for there is nothing in this Text from whence it can be concluded that any Sin is unpardonable, or that any Course of wilful Sin is above the Mercies of the Covenant of Grace, provided the Sinner do truly repent. Nay, neither is there any thing in this Text to discourage the Hopes of any Man's Repentance, how great a Sinner soever he hath been, so long as he continue in the Profession of Christianity. All this, I think, is very plain, from what I have discoursed upon this Text.

But then I must add farther, and which I desire all among us would seriously consider; it appears, by this Text, that the Case is very different

different as to those Persons that have once professed Christianity, and afterwards depart from it. Tho' there may be Hopes of a Man's Repentance, let him have been never so bad a Liver, so long as he continues in the Communion of the Christian Church, and adheres to the Religion of Christ; yet there is very little Hope of a Man that hath once given up his Name to Jesus, and afterwards proves a Deserter; departs from the Faith, and turns Atheist, or Deist, or, in any other sort, renounceth that Christianity he was baptized into: I say, there is very little Hope of such a Man; because he doth properly, and, in the Apostle's Sense, trample under foot the Son of God, and count the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy Thing. It Infinitely therefore concerns every one among us, to hold the Profession of their Faith without wavering; and tho' they do not live so holy and so pure Lives as they should, and as they must do, if ever they go to Heaven, yet, at least, to continue in the Profession of the Christian Religion, and to frequent the Ordinances of Jesus Christ; because, so long as they so do, they have the Advantage of the Means of Salvation, and those Means may at last prove effectual to their Conversion: Whereas, if they desert the Christian Institution, and go over to Heathenism, (as Deism is but another Name for that) there remains no more Sacrifice for their Sins, but
a cer-

a certain fearful Expectation of Judgment and fiery Indignation, to consume them, and all such contumacious Sinners as they are :

From which, God Almighty of his Mercy deliver us, for the sake, &c.



SERMON



S E R M O N X.

I Epist. of St. JOHN V. 16.

If any Man see his Brother sin a Sin which is not unto Death, he shall ask, and he shall give him Life for them that sin not unto Death. There is a Sin unto Death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.



HERE are three Texts (as I told you the last Time) in the New Testament, relating to the same Argument; which, as they have given much Trouble to Interpreters in the expounding of them, so have they often occasioned many Fears and Perplexities in the Consciences of timorous, melancholy Persons, by the Application they make of them.

The First is that in the xth of the *Hebrews*, where the Apostle asserts, That to those that sin wilfully, after they have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a fearful Expectation of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, to devour them: And of this I discoursed the last Time.

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The Second is the Passage of St. *John*, which I have now read unto you, where it is said, *There is a Sin unto Death*, which whoever commits, the Apostle doth not say that Prayer shall be made for him; and this I shall now discourse of.

The Third is that famous Passage of our Saviour, in St. *Matthew*, where he saith, *That whosoever shall speak a Word against the Holy Ghost, it shall never be forgiven him in this World, nor in this World to come.* This I reserve to another Opportunity.

These Assertions, at the first View, as they are very uncomfortable, so do they seem to clash with some of the received Doctrines of Christianity. For we generally believe, and we think we have Reason from the Gospel so to do, that Christ, by the Oblation of himself once offered, (as our Church expresseth it) made a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World: And consequently, there is no Sin a Man can commit so grievous, but that it will be pardoned, upon Repentance. And we also believe and teach, that there is no Sinner in so deplorable a Condition, that his Repentance ought to be despaired of, so long as he is in the Land of the Living. And therefore we make no Scruple, not only to pray for the greatest Sinners, but to exhort them to Repentance, whenever we have to do with such; and to encourage them, in case they do truly and

sincerely repent, to hope for God's Mercy and Acceptance. Now this would be a very unaccountable Proceeding, if we either believed that their Sins were unpardonable, or knew that they were beyond all Possibility of Repentance. And, indeed, this has been the Belief and Practice of the Church ever since our Saviour's Time; tho' there were some Sins, which, if in some Churches a Man was guilty of, he was never to be restored to the Communion of the Faithful, or expect the Church's Absolution, but to die excommunicate: yet, even in that Case, they did not pre-judge the Sinner to eternal Punishment, but exhorted him to express his Repentance all the Ways he could, and made no Scruple to encourage him, that if he was sincere in it, he might find Mercy at the Last Day with God. The *Montanists* and *Novarians* themselves, who were the severest in this Point, and made a Schism in the Church upon this very Account, that they thought the Church too easy in admitting lapsed Persons to Communion, yet did never deny or disown this; but declared it as their Doctrine, that there was no Sinner but might hope for Pardon from God, upon his Repentance, tho' the Sins (they said) he was guilty of might be such as that the Church had no Power to pardon him!

Well! But doth not St. *John* here expressly distinguish between two Sorts of Sins? One sort that is not unto Death, and the other

other sort that is unto Death? And doth not he say of this latter sort, that, if a Man be guilty of it, we are not so much as to pray for him? What Possibility then is there left of such a Man's Sin being forgiven him? This is the Thing I now come to give an Account of.

St. John's Words are these; *There is a Sin unto Death: I do not say that a Man shall pray for it.* The Difficulty of these Words lies in these two Things:

First; What is here meant by the Sin unto Death.

Secondly; How we are to understand the Apostle, when he saith, *I do not say that he shall pray for that Sin.*

I begin with the Notion of a Sin unto Death. A Sin may be called a Sin unto Death, in two respects: First, In respect of the present Danger of Death into which it puts the Sinner, tho', possibly, he may recover after it; and it shall not prove fatal to him. In this Sense every gross, wilful, presumptuous Sin, is a Sin unto Death; and so also is every Habit or Custom of known wilful Sin.

My Meaning is; Such Sins and such Habits do, for the present, put a Man into a State of Death, and destroy his Title to everlasting Happiness: But then, how deadly soever these Sins are in themselves, yet are they not so in Event, to all Persons; tho', to some Sinners, the Effect and Consequence

of them doth prove eternal Death; yet, in others, that Effect or Consequence is prevented by a timely Repentance. It is here, as it is in bodily Diseases; a Man that hath the Plague upon him, may properly enough be said to be visited with a mortal Sickneſs, becauſe, oftentimes and to many Perſons, it proves ſo in the Concluſion; and will probably prove ſo to him, unleſs by timely Care, and powerful Medicines, he prevent it: But, if he uſe theſe Means, there may be Hopes of his Recovery, notwithstanding the Malignity of the Diſeaſe.

This is the firſt Notion of a Sin unto Death; ſo that, if the Apoſtle ſpeak in this Senſe, and according to the full Latitude of it, the Sin unto Death here mentioned, muſt be underſtood of theſe grievous and capital Sins of which the Scripture pronounceth, *that thoſe that live in them ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God*: Such, for Inſtance, are Adultery, Fornication, Idolatry, Murder, Covetouſneſs, Extortion, Drunkenneſs, Hatred, Malice, and the like: Every one of which, as St. Paul tells us, *do exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven*. See Gal. v. 21. Cor. vi. 9.

And, on the other ſide, the Sin not unto Death here mentioned, and to which the Sin unto Death is oppoſed, muſt be underſtood of any of theſe Frailties, and Infirmities, and Interruptions of Piety; which tho' they are Sins properly ſo called, yet are conſiſtent with

with the Christian State, or the State of Grace and Regeneration, and destroy not a Man's Hopes of Happiness in the other World, tho' he never live to get an intire Victory over them.

But, *Secondly*; A Sin may be called a Sin unto Death, in respect of the Consequence of it; that is, certain Death to the Sinner; when the Sin, or Course of Sin, is not only damnable and mortal in itself, but doth really damn the Man that is guilty of it, doth *de facto*, destroy his Salvation, and he perishes everlastingly; this is truly a Sin unto Death, and indeed the most proper Notion of it, but perhaps it is not the most usual.

Now, in this Notion, no Man can sin the Sin unto Death, but he whose Sins are never pardoned. And every one doth sin the Sin unto Death, (let his particular Crimes be what they will) if he dies without Repentance. So that, according to this Account, that may be a Sin unto Death in one Man, that is not so in another: Because one Man's Murder, or Adultery, or Idolatry, or the like, may be damnable to him, tho' they will not be so to another that is guilty of them, because he repents of them.

It follows likewise, that as no Man can say of any Particular, that it is a Sin unto Death, in this Notion of it; so neither can he say of any particular Person, so long as he is in the Land of the Living, that he hath committed it: Because he knows not but the

Sinner may repent afterwards, and God may pardon him. It is true, it is much to be feared, that many Persons may be guilty of such Crimes, and may so obstinately persevere in them, (of what Nature soever these Crimes be, it matters not) that God, even while they live, may withdraw his Grace totally from them, and leave them to the Hardness of their Hearts, so that their everlasting Misery may be concluded before they go out of this World. In this Case it is certain indeed that they have sinned a Sin unto Death; but yet it is only known to God. No mortal Creature can know it, unless he knows that these Persons are thus forsaken by God, and that they are out of all Possibility of Repentance, or Pardon; which is hard for any to say of any Person, for any Sin, unless they have a Revelation for it, which I believe none can now pretend to.

Thus have I given you the two general Senses in which a Sin may be called a Sin unto Death: But the great Question is still behind; that is to say, In what Sense it is that we are to understand the Sin unto Death here spoken of, and for which the Apostle here seems to discourage our praying.

To this I answer in these Particulars:

First; To interpret the Sin unto Death, here mentioned, of all grievous presumptuous Sins, or Habits of Sin, that, unrepented of, destroy Salvation, (which is the first Notion that I gave of a Sin unto Death) I say, to interpret

pret it of all Sins in general, (as some have done) without Limitation, doth not seem to agree either with St. *John's* Phrase, or the Scope of the Place. Nor can it be well reconciled with the constant Practice of the Christian Church, which has always thought itself obliged, not only to pray for several such Sinners, but to admit them to Communion, and to warrant their Pardon upon their Repentance.

In the Second Place; To take the Sin unto Death in the latter Notion I have given; namely, for every such Sin or Sins, which, tho' they were pardonable in themselves, and might have been pardoned to the Sinner, if he would have made use of God's Grace for his Repentance, yet have never *de facto* been pardoned, but the Sinner shall die in his Sin: I say, to take the Sin unto Death, here spoken of, in this Notion, as some very learned Expositors have done, has this great Inconvenience attending it; namely, that such an Exposition renders the Apostle's Injunction here, about praying for Sinners, wholly impracticable. For, according to this Notion, none can know (as I said) but God only, what are Sins unto Death, and what are not; since it is the Event alone that makes the Difference: Whereas the Apostle's Injunction in the Text supposeth, that a Man may know what is a Sin not unto Death, and what is a Sin unto Death; otherwise he would not have given us different Rules

for our Prayers, as to those two sorts of Sins.

In the Third Place Therefore; That Interpretation of the Sin unto Death, which I think most probable, (because indeed most agreeable with the Scope of the Apostle in this Place, and because it avoids likewise the Inconveniencies that follow upon the two former ways of expounding it) is this. To take the Sin unto Death in the first Notion I gave of it, that is to say, for some gross, wilful, deadly Sin, that, unrepented of, destroys Salvation: But not to extend it to all such Sins, but to restrain it to one particular sort of them, just as the sinning wilfully in Saint *Paul*, for which there remains no more Sacrifice, is not every wilful Sin committed after Baptism, but only one sort of wilful Sins, as I largely shewed the last Time. If it be asked, What particular kind of Sin that is, which is here called the Sin unto Death? Why truly, all Things consider'd, it will appear most probable, that it is the very same with St. *Paul's* wilful Sin; that is to say, a renouncing of Christianity, and the Communion of the Church, and going over to the Enemies of it. My Reason for this Assertion is this:

The Apostle's Business here, and indeed throughout this whole Epistle, is to keep the *Jewish* Christians firm to the Faith, and to the Christian Assemblies; from which many had now departed, denying that Jesus is the

the Christ. (See Chap. ii. Ver. 18, 19, — 22.) In order to this, he sets himself to shew them, that whatever Boasts these Deserters might make, of obtaining eternal Life by their Way, yet eternal Life was only to be had in Jesus Christ; that is to say, by believing in him, and holding Communion with his Church. Thus, in the 11th Verse of this Chapter; *This is the Record, that God hath given us eternal Life, and this Life is in his Son.* And in the 13th Verse; *These things have I written to you that believe on the Name of the Son of God, and that ye may know ye have eternal Life, seeing ye believe on the Name of the Son of God.* And indeed upon this Account it is that the Name of *Life* is so often given to our Saviour by this Apostle, as his proper Title, and distinguishing Character. Thus in the 1st Chapter, Verse 2. speaking of Jesus Christ, he tells us, *the Life was manifested:* And again, in the 20th Verse of this Chapter; *This is the true God, and eternal Life.* Thus also in the 12th Verse of this Chapter; *He that hath the Son, hath the Life; but he that hath not the Son, hath not the Life.*

These Things being thus considered, we may thus argue; That since to believe in Jesus Christ, and to hold to the Communion of the Faithful, *is* (remember the Apostle's Phrase) *to be in Life*, or to have the Life; it is reasonable to conclude, that when he speaks of being in Death, of a Sin unto Death, he means,

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it of those that do not believe in Jesus Christ, or that renounce the Christian Societies, and go over either to the Antichrists so often mentioned in this Epistle, or to the Heathen Idolaters, against whom he cautions them in the last Verse of this Chapter, when he concludes, *Little Children, keep yourselves from Idols.* And thus much let it suffice to have spoken to the first general Point, the Notion of the Sin unto Death. I might add other Considerations to confirm the Account I have given of it, but I am afraid of tiring you.

I therefore pass on to the second general Point to be inquired into; and that is, What is the Apostle's Meaning, when having told us there is a Sin unto Death, he adds, *I do not say that a Man shall pray for it*; but of this I shall make no long Work.

First of all; It is certain that those Words, even according to this Translation of them, do not amount to a Prohibition of Prayer for those that have sinned the Sin unto Death. If the Apostle had meant to forbid Christians to pray for such, he might, with the least Variation, have placed his Words thus; There is a Sin unto Death; I say you shall not pray for it; this indeed had been to the Purpose: But when he only saith, *I do not say that you shall pray for it*, the Sense cannot be carried so high. The utmost that the Words can be extended to is this, I do not bid you to pray for it: And every one knows that there is a great deal of Difference

ence, between not bidding one to do a thing, and forbidding the doing of it.

But, Secondly; The true and the full Sense and Design of these Words will be easily seen, if we join them with the former Part of the Verse, and translate them as they should be translated; that is, according to the most natural and obvious Construction of the *Greek Text*; namely, thus: *If any one see his Brother sinning a Sin not unto Death, he shall ask of God, and God shall give Life to him, even to all those that sin not unto Death. There is a Sin unto Death; it is not of this I speak that he shall ask.* (The Words are, *ὁ πρὸς ταύτης λέγω ὅτι ἐρωτήσῃ*, which every body knows must be translated as I said, *it is not of this I speak that he shall ask*) How ask? Why, supply what went before, and the Sense will be clear, that he shall ask, and that God shall give him Life; that is to say, it is not of this Sin unto Death that I speak, when I say that God will hear and answer the Petitions of Christians, that are made for the Sins of others. They cannot pray for this, with the same Assurance of Success that they may have when they pray for other Sins.

This seems to be the whole of what is designed by the Apostle in this Clause; he doth not forbid praying for any, nor discourage praying for any, only he insinuates, that Prayers for some Persons will not be granted, or at least they cannot so confidently promise to

to themselves, that they shall be granted.

Having thus given an Account of these two Difficulties proposed, there is nothing remains to make the Text very easy and intelligible to every one, but to give a brief Paraphrase of it, according to the Grounds I have laid down.

I take, then, the Sense of the whole Passage to be to this Effect :

If any see his Brother, after his undertaking the Christian Profession, fall into any Sin, he is not to despair of him; seeing he is under the Means of Grace, and the Mercies of the Covenant. On the contrary, both particular Christians, and the Officers of the Church, are to intercede with God for such a Sinner : And there is no Doubt but, upon their Prayers in the Name of Christ, God will be prevailed with to afford him such a Measure of Grace, as with his own Endeavours, and the Use of the Means of Reconciliation that are lodged in the Church, will be sufficient for his Recovery, and obtaining his Pardon. This Benefit, we that are in the Church, and adhere to Christ's Religion, have above others; tho' we sin, there is a Means provided for our Recovery. As for those that deny the Lord that bought them, and fall away either to the *Jewish* Antichrists, or the *Heathen* Idolaters, there is not the same Hope of them, nor the same Encouragement, as to Success, to be given to the Prayers of others for them; since they have renounced
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the Son of God, who is the Life, and in whom only Life is to be had: They must needs be concluded to be in a State of Death. It is not therefore of such Sinners as these that I speak, when I tell you that you are to pray for those that sin, and that you may be confident that God will give Life to them: for you cannot be so confident that God will hear your Prayers for such Apostates; their Case is more dangerous, and their Cure more difficult.

I am afraid I have wearied you with this large Explication of my Text: But I shall make Amends by the Shortness of my Application. Two or three Inferences I would make from what has been said, and I conclude.

First of all: From the Account I have given of this Text, it appears, that it may be very lawful, nay, a very charitable and pious Thing, to pray for all sorts of Sinners, even the greatest, any thing herein said notwithstanding: For we see there is nothing here said that doth either forbid, or in the least cast any ill Reflection upon such an Action; and if not here, sure no-where in the Book of God.

On the contrary, St. Paul doth exhort, *that Prayers, and Supplications and Intercessions be made for all Men*, without any Restriction, 1 Tim. ii. 1. And our Saviour commands his Disciples *to bless them that curse them, to pray for them that despitefully use them, and persecute them.* Which Prayer, why it should

should be construed only to Heathen Persecutors, and not extend to Apostates also, I see no Reason: He himself prayed for those that crucified him; some of which were; without Doubt, those very Pharisees, whom he had before charged with committing the Sin against the Holy Ghost, in the xiith Ch. of *Matth.* St. *Stephen* likewise prayed for those that stoned him, when yet, a little before, he had told them; they resisted the Holy Ghost. Certainly there is no Sinner so bad, or in so deplorable a Condition, but we may pray for him; nay, Charity will oblige us to it; and tho' our Prayers be not available for him, yet they will be beneficial to ourselves: And God Almighty, though he doth not answer them to the Advantage of the Sinner prayed for, yet will reward us for our Charity in putting them up.

If it be said, that *David* was so far from praying for all, that he cursed several of his Enemies, making solemn Prayers, or rather Imprecations against them, as particularly in the sixth *Psalms*: To this I answer, First, That the Gospel Spirit is a different Thing from that of the Law, as our Saviour once told his Disciples, when they were calling for Fire from Heaven to consume their Enemies, as *Elias* did: Christ's Religion obligeth us to a far more extensive Charity, than that of *Moses* did the *Jews*.

But, Secondly; *David's* Imprecations were not so much Prayers to God against his Enemies,

mies, as Prophecies of what evil Things should befall those Sinners he there speaks of. Any one, that understands any thing of the Hebrew Language, knows, that the same Form of Words is therein used both in praying for a Thing, and in foretelling that it shall come to pass: And as for the sixth *Psalms*, which has been often called the Psalm of Curses, it is plainly a Prophecy, partly of what should befall *Anchitophel* for his treacherous Usage of *David*, but principally of what should befall the Traitor *Judas* for betraying his and our Lord and Master Jesus Christ; and, as such, it is quoted by St. *Peter* in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

But, Secondly; From what has been said, we may raise Matter of Comfort and Satisfaction to many weak uninstructed Christians. There are a great many, as I said, that partly thro' Melancholy, and an ill Habit of Body, partly thro' the Terrors of an awaken'd Conscience, joined with an Ignorance and Misunderstanding of this and the like Texts, are mightily apt to conclude, that they have sinned the Sin unto Death, and that consequently no Prayer, either of their own, or other good Christians, will be available for them; or, that they have committed the wilful Sin, for which, St. *Paul* saith, *there remains no more Sacrifice*; or that they are fallen from Grace, and so it is impossible to renew them to Repentance; or, lastly, that they have committed the Sin against the Holy

The Tenth Sermon.

Holy Ghost. As for this last, the Sin against the Holy Ghost, I shall treat of it the next Time we meet: But for the other Texts, I hope I have made it appear, that the Persons I now speak of are no ways concerned in any of them; for I suppose the Persons that have these Apprehensions of themselves, do profess themselves Christians, and have never fallen off from that Profession; though, possibly, they may have been guilty of many other grievous Sins: They have never renounced their Lord and Master Christ, or turned Apostates from his Religion; but have always owned him and it, both in publick and private: Tho' possibly their Lives and Practices have not been, in all respects, so suitable as they ought to have been to such a Profession.

Now, if the Case be thus with them, I think it has been made out, with Evidence enough, that they cannot be guilty of any of the Crimes mentioned in these Texts; that is to say, they have neither sinned the wilful Sin, nor fallen away after enlightening, nor sinned the Sin unto Death: Since these Crimes import neither more nor less than an Apostasy from the Christian Religion, and going over either to Atheism, or Heathenism, or some other Religion that is contrary to the Christian.

But, Thirdly and Lastly; Let no Man from hence, or upon this Account that he hath not sinned the Sin unto Death, encourage himself

himself in any evil Course or Habit of Sin, seem it never so slight and excusable to him. There are a hundred Ways of going to Hell, besides these Sins I have been treating of; and far the greatest Part that are now concluded in eternal Misery, it is probable, never sinned in this kind. Every wilful Sin, or Habit of Sin, continued in, be it never so plausible or fashionable, be there never so many Pleas and Apologies to be made for it, from Temper and Constitution, from Business and Interest, or from the Mode and Custom of the Place where we live; I say, all such Sins persisted in, will as certainly destroy a Man's Salvation, as the Sin against the Holy Ghost.

Oh, therefore, let no Man indulge himself in any evil Course, that God's Law hath declared against, in Hopes that it will be easily passed by, because it is none of those enormous Crimes, that do continually fly in a Man's Face, and have a Mark of Infamy put upon them by the Laws of the Country. Why, any known Sin, encouraged and persisted in, and never repented of, may prove as fatal to a Man's Soul, as a Torrent of open Impieties. And again; Let no Man indulge himself in any evil Course, in Confidence that he hath not yet sinned beyond a Probability of Pardon, or in Prospect that hereafter he may repent: This is a most intolerable Presumption upon God's Mercy, and it is the readiest Course we can take to provoke God

The Tenth Sermon.

to withdraw his Grace from us, and to give us up to Hardness of Heart, and final Impenitency. And when it once comes to that, our eternal State is concluded, and we have indeed sinned a Sin unto Death in one Sense, and no Prayers or Intercessions will be available for us. But as the Apostle said in this very Case, so I hope I may say to you, *Brethren, I am persuaded better Things of you, and Things that accompany Salvation, tho' I thus speak.*

I pray God give us all Grace to consider the Things that belong to our everlasting Salvation; and, in Pursuance thereof, to hold the Profession of our Faith unto the End, and to bring forth Fruits suitable to that Profession, by a righteous, and sober, and godly Conversation: This God Almighty grant, for the sake of his dear Son; To whom, &c.



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S E R M O N XI.

M A T T. XII. 31, 32.

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men; but the Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men. And whosoever speaketh a Word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh a Word against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this World, nor in the World to come.



IT is my Design, at this Time, to give an Account of this difficult Text; and, in doing that, to explain the Nature of that Sin, which, in common Speech, we call the Sin against the Holy Ghost. I have observed how much that Sin is often mistaken, and what Trouble and Perplexities of Mind have hence arisen to well-meaning People, but especially those that are hypochondriack in their Tempers: I thought therefore that a plain Account of this might be of some Service.

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There are many Sins against the Holy Ghost; *Whosoever grieveth the Spirit, or quencheth the Spirit*, both which things St. Paul cautions the Christians against, sinneth against the Holy Ghost. *Ananias and Sapphira*, in the Lye they told St. Peter, are said to lye against the Holy Ghost. St. Stephen calls the Stubborness and Disobedience of the *Jews* to the Admonitions of the Prophets, a resisting the Holy Ghost, and consequently a Sin against him. *Simon Magus's* Sin, in offering to purchase the Gift of the Spirit with Money, was a Sin against the Holy Ghost.

But none of these seem to be the Sin against the Holy Ghost; the Sin which, by way of Eminence, we call so, and of which we are now to treat. The not observing this Distinction, has given Occasion to many of those Notions, concerning this great Sin, which have too often perplexed the Consciences of weak Persons.

For the finding out what this Sin is, we must take the Scriptures for our Guide, and them only; nay, we must keep close to the very Words and Phrases in which it is there spoken of, having also a special Regard to the Occasion of these Speeches.

The Neglect of this, is another Reason why Men have been so different, and some of them so unlucky, in their Apprehensions and Definitions of this Sin; running away with this, that the Sin is unpardonable, they
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looked not much farther in the Scriptures for the Nature of it; but presently concluded, that that Sin which was the greatest, or to them appeared so, must needs be it.

There is no Text, in the Epistles of the New Testament, that doth in express Words mention it. And as for the Evangelists, there are three of them indeed that speak of it, but each of them but once, and all of them upon the same Occasion. From these Texts therefore we are wholly to take our Measures. Of these three Texts, this that I have read unto you is much the largest and fullest; and therefore I have pitched upon it, and shall now apply myself to give an Account of it.

In speaking to it, I shall endeavour these five Things.

First; To give an Account of the Sin here mentioned, which is expressed by two Names, the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and the Speaking against the Holy Ghost, which is here said shall never be forgiven.

Secondly; To give an Account of the lesser sort of Sins here mentioned, which are here put in Antithesis, or by way of Opposition to the former; that is, in the former Verse, all manner of Sin and Blasphemy; and in the latter more particularly, the speaking a Word against the Son of Man; which Sins, it is here said, shall be forgiven unto Men.

The Eleventh Sermon.

Thirdly; To shew in what Sense it is said of the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, That it *shall never be forgiven in this World, nor in that which is to come.*

Fourthly; To examine whether from hence it may be concluded, that the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is a Sin absolutely unpardonable.

Fifthly; To inquire whether it is possible for Christians to commit this Sin, and likewise what Sins do most nearly approach to it.

An Account of these Particulars will be sufficient for the resolving most of those Difficulties that are usually raised upon this Argument.

The First thing I am to do, is, To give an Account of the great Sin here spoken of in the Text, which is that we call the Sin against the Holy Ghost. Now, to the clearing of this, the Terms by which the Text expresseth it, will not a little contribute. We, in common Speech, call it the Sin against the Holy Ghost; but the Text doth not style it by that general Name, but by a much more particular one; such a Name, as instructs us to what a particular Kind or Rank of Sins we are to reduce it; that is to say, *Blasphemy, or speaking reproachful Words against another.* It is very observable, that it is no where called the Sin against the Holy Ghost, neither in this Text, nor in either of the two other Gospels, but always the Blasphemy
against

against the Holy Ghost, or Speaking against the Holy Ghost: The latter of which Terms means the very same with the former; for Blaspheming is nothing else, but Speaking against another. It is true, in our *English* Language we make a Difference between Blaspheming and Speaking against another, because we appropriate Blasphemy to such Words or evil Speeches as are spoken against God; but the Scripture makes no Difference. To blaspheme, is used, not only with respect to God, but with respect to other Persons, and Things also; and imports neither more nor less than Slander, Calumny or evil Speeches, against whatsoever or whomsoever they are spoken. Thus, in the 8th Verse of the Epistle of *Jude*, where we in *English* translate *speaking evil of Dignities*, in the *Greek* it is, *blaspheming Dignities*. And two Verses after, where our Translators render, *These Men speak evil of Things that they know not*; in the *Greek* it is, *These Men blaspheme Things that they know not*. And thus St. Paul, in the *iiid* of *Titus*, 2d Verse, commands, *That Christians should speak evil of no Man*; in the *Greek* it is, *that they should blaspheme no Man*. Thus, *Rom. iii.* where St. Paul saith of himself, *that he is slanderously reported of*; in the *Greek* it is, *that he is blasphemed*. And twenty other Instances there are of this kind.

Thus much then we have undeniably got towards the finding out the Sin against the

Holy Ghost; namely, that it doth consist in Blasphemy, or Calumny, or slanderous Words. That now which remains to be found out is, what kind of Blasphemy it is, which is here called the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; or, of what kind of slanderous Words we are here to understand the Words spoken of against him. If we can once come to a certain Knowledge of this, we may be able to form a certain Notion of the Sin against the Holy Ghost.

Now, for this, we must have recourse to the Context; and, by well perusing that, we shall not fail of what we seek for.

The Occasion of these Words of our Saviour in the Text, was this: It appears by the 22d, 23d, and 24th Verses of this Chapter, that our Saviour having cast forth a Devil out of a Man that was both blind and dumb, and made him perfectly to see and speak; and the People being amazed at this great Miracle, and concluding from hence, that Jesus must necessarily be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of *David*; the Pharisees, to put them into another Belief, and so to hinder them from coming over to be his Disciples, do maliciously give out, that tho' Jesus did cast out Devils, yet it was not by any divine Power, but merely by the Power of Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils.

What now saith our Saviour to this? Why, two Things: First, He endeavours to shew the Groundlessnes of their Slander or Calumny;

ny; and, Secondly, To convince them of the Grievousness of the Sin, and the Greatness of the Punishment they thereby drew upon themselves, in thus scandalizing his Miracles, and saying, *They were done by the Power of the Devil.*

The Groundlessness of their Slander he shews, by offering three Reasons, or Arguments, which might convince any reasonable Man, and especially them, that his Miracles could not be wrought by the Help of the Devil, but by the Spirit of God.

The First was, That it was utterly against the Interest of the Devil's Kingdom, to maintain and allow Divisions among themselves; or that one Devil should oppose, or eject another, (as, if they said true of our Saviour, they must needs do); for this was the ready way to bring that Kingdom to Desolation. This is the Sum of the two next Verses.

Secondly; They had no more Reason to say he cast out Devils by Beelzebub, than they had to say the same of several of their own People, or Disciples, who either did cast out Devils, or pretended so to do, in the Name of the God of *Abraham*, and of *Isaac*, and of *Jacob*. Now, since they cast no such Imputation of Magick or Sorcery upon them, why should they upon him? This is the Sum of the two next Verses.

But, Thirdly, which was a demonstrative Argument, It appears plainly, both from the Design of Christ's Miracles, and the Tendency

cy of his Doctrines, that he was so far from working them, by Collusion or Confederacy with the Devil, that, on the contrary, he was the greatest Enemy the Devil had; nay, that he was his Superior, and overcame him, binding the strong Man, and spoiling his House, doing all the Mischief that was possible to his Kingdom. This is the Sum of the two Verses before the Text. And thus, having by these three Arguments vindicated himself from their Slanders, he comes, in the second Place, to testify against their Sin, and to warn them of the Punishment that attended it, in the Words of the Text; *Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Man; but the Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Man.* As much as to say; Since, from what I have said, it appears so evidently, that your Charge against me is altogether groundless, and that there is no Colour for your saying, *that I cast out Devils by the Help of the Devil*; Nay, you yourselves are convinced, that you slander my Works; (for it is said a little before, that Jesus knew their Thoughts) and, if you would speak your Hearts, you cannot but confess, that they are true Miracles, and done by the Spirit of God: I say, Since this is your Case, pray think what a grievous Crime you are guilty of, in thus traducing and calumniating this good Spirit of God, and calling him a Devil. *All other Sins*

Sins and Blasphemies shall be forgiven unto Men; but this Blasphemy of yours is of so horrible a Nature, that whoever is guilty of it shall never be forgiven, but is in Danger of eternal Damnation. as St. Mark expresseth it.

Thus do the Words of the Text plainly lie with relation to the foregoing Words; and whoever will not violently rend one Part of our Saviour's Discourse from another, must of Necessity put this Construction upon them. So that there will be no need of many Words to persuade you, that the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and the Speaking against him here mentioned, was spoken wholly with relation to the Pharisees; and that this Blasphemy, this Speaking against the Spirit, was neither more nor less than their asserting, that our Saviour cast out Devils, and wrought his other Miracles, by Beelzebub; or thus, their asserting, that the Spirit, by which he did these Works, was an impure Spirit; than which there cannot be a greater Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, or worse Words spoken against him.

That this is the true and only Account of the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, if what I have said do not persuade us, let St. Mark's express Affirmation do it: He, in the parallel Text in the iiii^d of his Gospel, Vers. 28, 29. having set down this Passage of our Saviour, *That all other Sins and Blasphemies shall be forgiven unto Men; but he that blas-*

blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, hath never Forgiveness, but is in Danger of eternal Damnation; in the very next Verse adds, as the Reason why our Saviour had so said, Because, saith he, the Pharisees said he had an unclean Spirit.

If any one ask, Why should not this Calumny of the Pharisees be rather accounted and stiled a Blasphemy against our Saviour, than against the Holy Ghost? the Answer is easy to any one that understands the Scripture Language; for there all Miracles and extraordinary Works, whether performed by the Prophets, or by our Saviour, or by his Apostles, are constantly attributed to the Holy Spirit, and accounted the Effects of his Power and Operation; and therefore to say that our Saviour's Miracles were done by the Devil, was most properly an Affront put upon the Holy Ghost, by whom he wrought them.

I know not what further to add towards the clearing of this Point, unless it be to take notice of that Passage of our Saviour, which follows three or four Verses after my Text, where he is still upon the same Subject; *I say unto you, saith he, that every idle Word that Men shall speak, they shall give an Account thereof at the Day of Judgment.* What is here meant by an *idle Word*? Is every light, and foolish, and unprofitable Speech in Conversation, that doth not tend to Edification, an idle Word? God forbid: For who

is there then, that shall not be called to an Account? No; the idle Words here, are false and scandalous Words: Just as, to swear vainly and idly, is the Scripture Term to express Swearing falsely: And the Tongue that speaketh Vanity or Idleness, is the Tongue that speaketh Lyes. And several other Instances there are in Scripture, where the Word is used in the same Sense.

This then seems to be our Saviour's Sense; Verily I say unto you, that for every Slander or Calumny that ye vent against any Man, ye shall be called to a severe Account; and therefore much more may ye expect to be so, when ye calumniate and slander the Holy Ghost, by ascribing his Works to Beelzebub.

But I proceed to the Second Thing I am to give an Account of in this Text, and that is, what is meant by those other lesser Sins that are here set in Opposition to the Sin against the Holy Ghost; and which, it is said, shall be forgiven unto Men, whereas the Sin against the Holy Ghost shall not. There are in the first Class in the Text, expressed generally all manner of Sin and Blasphemy; and in the latter Class, more particularly the speaking a Word against the Son of Man: These, it is said, shall be forgiven unto Men.

As for the first Expression, *All manner of Sin and Blasphemy*; I must confess I like their Account best, who expound it not of all kind of Sins indiscriminately, but of Sins
of

of one particular sort, namely, such Sins as he was here reprovng, that is to say, *Sins that were committed against others*. So that, in this Sense, the Sins here mentioned will be much the same thing with the Blasphemies; and then all manner of Sin and Blasphemy will be no more than all manner of Affronts and Slanders. This Interpretation seems best to suit with the Scope of the Place; for our Saviour here is not discoursing of any Sins but Slander and Blasphemy: And his Business is to shew, how much the Slander and Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost doth exceed all other Slanders. And it is observable, that in the parallel Text of St. *Luke* there is no mention of Sins, but only of Blasphemy.

And then, as for the lesser Class in the Text, *the speaking a Word against the Son of Man*, without Doubt, by the Son of Man, we are to understand our Lord Jesus Christ; and to speak a Word against him, will be to talk slightly and reproachfully of him; as calling him a Glutton, or a Wine-bibber, as he himself tells us several of the *Jews* did. So that these Words are a new Proposition, and express a farther Sense than the former Verse did: That is, to this Effect; I say unto you, that all manner of Slanders and Blasphemy, wherewith Men slander others, shall be forgiven them; but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven them: Nay, I say further to you, Whoever slanders,

or

or speaks Evil of me, who am more than an ordinary Person, a Prophet sent from God, disparaging either my Person, or my Preaching; yet even this shall be forgiven him: But whoever speaks against the Miracles that I do, and saith they are done by the Power of the Devil; this is so horrid a Blasphemy, that it shall never be forgiven him, either in this World, or in the other.

If any one ask, Upon what Account it is that the speaking against the Miracles of our Saviour, is of so heinous and damning a Nature above all other Blasphemies; I answer, there is great Reason for it; because the Miracles that our Saviour wrought, were the principal Evidence that he gave, or could give, of his being sent from God; and, consequently, the great Means for the converting the whole World to his Religion. And therefore, to speak against them, and to attribute them to the Power of the Devil, must needs be, as the most spiteful and malicious, so also the most mischievous Blasphemy in the World; because it was the most effectual Way to hinder People from believing on him, and, consequently, to defeat all God's gracious Ends, of bringing Men to Salvation by the Gospel, than which the Devil himself cannot do a worse Thing.

I pass on to the Third Difficulty in this Text, which is the Importance of that Phrase, *neither in this World, nor in the World to come.* Our Saviour is not content to say, in the former

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former Verse, that the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven; but he adds in the latter Verse, *that it shall never be forgiven in this World, nor in the World to come.* Which Expression some of the Church of *Rome* would suborn, for the proving their Doctrine of Purgatory; they would conclude from hence, that a Man may in the other World make Satisfaction for his Sins, so that they shall then be forgiven him, tho' they were not forgiven in this Life: But this is without any Ground at all. All that our Saviour designs to express is this; That this Sin of the Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost shall be grievously punished, both in this World, and in the other: And the Phrase, by which he expresseth it, was very well known and familiar to those he spoke to; it was a common and received Doctrine among the *Jews*, that, for some Sins, a Man was pardoned presently upon his Repentance; that other Sins were not pardoned, 'till the solemn Day of Expiation, which came once a Year: That other Sins, which were yet greater, were not to be expiated but by some grievous temporal Affliction. But all Sins (those that could not be pardoned these Ways) were yet expiated by Death, supposing the Man was an *Israelite*; the Life of an *Israelite* was a sufficient Atonement for his Sin; and no *Israelite*, but such an one as renounced his Faith, could be punished in the other World. To this Opinion of theirs, which

(which is very common in their Books) our Saviour in this Expression seems to have respect; as if he had said, Flatter not yourselves with a Conceit, that you *Israelites* shall have all your Sins purged either in this Life by your Sufferings, or at the farthest by your Death. No, I assure you, this Blasphemy and open Affront that you put upon the Spirit of God, is a Crime of so high a Nature, that it shall not be expiated either in this Life, or at your Death; but those that are guilty of it, shall have a miserable Portion, both in this World and that which is to come. This seems to be the full Importance of this Expression.

But there is a greater Difficulty behind, which is, that I am to speak to in the fourth Place; and that is, Whether from what is here said concerning the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, it may be concluded that that Sin is absolutely unpardonable to all Persons that are guilty of it.

I must confess, this is an Inquiry more curious than necessary, since which way soever it be determined, it will not much concern any of us, who cannot be supposed to have sinned the Sin against the Holy Ghost, or to be ordinarily capable of so doing: However, for the giving further Satisfaction to timorous and hypochondriack Persons, it will not be amiss, if we say something to this Point; leaving it in the mean time to every

Person to receive or reject, as in his Discretion he shall see Cause.

It is the Opinion of several most eminent and learned Divines, that our Saviour's Words here are not to be taken in an absolute, but in a comparative Sense; that is to say, that when he says, *All manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men, but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men*, his Meaning is no more, than that all other Sins and Blasphemies shall sooner be forgiven, than this Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. For, say they, if his Words be to be taken in an absolute Sense, without this Comparison, then the first Part of his Proposition is not true: For it is certain, that all other Sins and Blasphemies shall not actually be forgiven to all Men; but some shall perish in their Sins and Blasphemies. They say therefore, that our Saviour makes use of an *Hebrew* Form of Speech, which is very frequently to be met with in the Scriptures, when the Difficulty of a Thing coming to pass is designed to be expressed by the *Jewish* Authors. Thus they will say, Such a Thing shall come to pass, but another Thing shall not come to pass; where it is not their Design to affirm of the former Thing that it shall really come to pass, but only to express the much greater Difficulty there is, that the latter Thing should ever come to pass. An Instance we have of this way of Expression, in the 5th Chap-

Chapter of St. *Matth.* where our Saviour says, *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my Words shall never pass away.* Now certainly his Meaning there is not, that Heaven and Earth shall really pass away, but that they should sooner pass away, than his Words should: And so indeed St. *Luke* expresseth it. So that, according to this Interpretation of my Text, (which I must confess I think the true one) it appears that our Saviour doth not here speak either of the Pardonableness of some Sins, or the Unpardonableness of others: But only comparatively, of the much greater Danger and Difficulty of obtaining Pardon for the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, than for any other Blasphemy.

But, if we are unwilling to take the Words in this comparative Sense, and think they should rather be understood positively and absolutely, as they are expressed, let us take them so: So let the Sense of them be, that all other Calumnies and Blasphemies may be forgiven unto Men, but this particular Sin, the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, shall never be forgiven unto Men. Yet I desire it may be observed, in the first Place, that it will not follow from hence, that there is any Sin that shall not be pardoned upon Repentance: No, still this will be a true Proposition, namely, that there is no Sin so great, but if the Sinner do sincerely repent, he may hope for Mercy at God's Hands. And,

if he that is guilty of the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, do not, or shall not find Mercy, it is purely because he doth not, or cannot repent of it. That is to say, when a — Man is come to such a high Degree of Malice, and Impudence, and Obstinacy in sinning, that he dares affront the Holy Ghost, by ascribing his Works to the Devil, it is just in God to deny that Person that Grace which is necessary to his Repentance, and so to his Pardon; and to leave him irremediably in the Condition he hath brought himself into. It is upon the Supposition of this only, that the Sin against the Holy Ghost is unpardonable. But this is the Case of many other Sinners, besides those that have committed this Sin. Many Persons may have sinned so long — and so obstinately, that God may have totally forsaken them before they die; and then it is certain of these Persons, that their Sins shall never be forgiven, because they shall never repent.

So that this Unpardonableness of the Sin against the Holy Ghost is no Bar in the least to our exhorting and encouraging all sorts of Persons to Repentance, even the greatest Sinners; nor any Bar to their Hopes of Pardon, if they do repent; no more than the Guilt of any other grievous Sin is. We may, for all that, safely promise Pardon to all true Penitents, for all Sins whatsoever, without Exception; and in the same Degree we can persuade them to repent, in the same Degree

Degree we may hope of them. *Athanasius's* Words do fitly come in upon this Occasion. " God did not, saith he, say to him ^{See Quest. ad Antioc. 72. p. 285.} " that blasphemes and repents, It shall not " be forgiven; but to him that blasphemes " and remains in his Blasphemy: For there " is no Sin that God will not pardon to them " that worthily repent."

But, *Secondly*, I add this farther, that this Saying of our Saviour's, taking it in its rigorous Sense, doth not exclude all those that sin against the Holy Ghost, from all Possibility of Repentance, and therefore consequently from all Possibility of obtaining Pardon: For there are several Degrees of Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. This Blasphemy in some Persons may be aggravated with more Knowledge, and Wilfulness, and Malice, than in others; and these others, that sin with less Knowledge, and less Malice, and less Wilfulness, are more capable Objects of God's Grace, and Mercy, and Forgiveness. And besides, it is enough for the verifying these kind of Threatnings, that they shall generally, and for the most part, be inflicted; tho' not always, and in all Cases, and on all Persons. Those very Persons that our Saviour here chargeth with the Sin against the Holy Ghost, and that afterwards crucified him, yet those very Persons our Saviour prays for, that their Sin might be forgiven; and those very Persons *St. Peter* afterwards preached to, and calleth

upon them, to wash away their Sin by Baptism and Repentance. This is an Argument that the Case of all them was not desperate, but that some of them might repent and be forgiven. And one of the Fathers doubts not to say, (I think it is St. *Ambrose*) that some of those Three thousand that were converted by St. *Peter's* first Sermon, were of these Pharisees that had been guilty of the Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost. (See Mr. *H.* p. 22.)

There is nothing more positively threatened in the New Testament, than actual Damnation to the unworthy Receivers of the Lord's Supper, among the *Corinthians*. *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, saith St. Paul, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself.* Now let us take Damnation here in what Sense we will, it will be very hard to say that all those that did then eat or drink unworthily, or have done so at any time since, did or shall actually incur that Punishment. God Almighty, like all other Lawgivers, when he makes Laws, and annexes Punishments to them, to deter from the Transgression of them, doth not thereby so tie up his own Hands, but that he hath still the Power of granting Repentance, and upon that, Pardon, as he sees Cause: And in the midst of his Judgment his Mercy will find a Place, if the Sinner, by a monstrous Degree of Obstinacy, hath not made himself incapable of it.

But

But enough upon this Head. Having thus given an Account (or at least endeavoured it) of all the Difficulties in the Text, what remains, is, in the Fifth and last Place, to inquire, whether Christians at this Day can be guilty of this Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost: And what those Sins are that do most nearly approach to it.

This Inquiry is the more needful, because several Persons, under the Power of Melancholy, are apt to fancy they are guilty of this unpardonable Sin, tho', as it may appear from what has been said, without any Reason at all. I shall briefly comprize what I have to say upon this Head, in these following Particulars.

First of all, if we take the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost precisely as our Saviour here discourseth of it, it is impossible that any Man now living should be guilty of it, because no Man can be in those Circumstances that they were whom he here charges it upon; they were Eye-witnesses of his Miracles, and so had the greatest Evidence that was possible of the Truth of them, and yet attributed them to Sorcery and Witchcraft. But now, none but those that lived at that Time, were capable of blaspheming in this Manner. Secondly, It is impossible for one that professeth Christianity, so long as he professeth it, to be guilty of the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost here spoken of: I do not speak, as to the Circumstances,

(for as to those I just now spoke) but as to the Kind of the Blasphemy, he cannot be guilty of that Kind of Blasphemy. For whosoever professeth Christianity, let him be never so wicked otherways, yet he pretends to believe that it is the true Religion, and that Christ was a true Prophet. And, if he pretends or professes to believe so, he cannot at the same Time give out that Christ was an Impostor, and wrought his Miracles by the Power of the Devil, which, as I have shewed, is the only Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost mentioned in the Gospel.

Thirdly, If there be any Man among us that is convinced of the Truth of the Matter of Fact concerning our Saviour's History, that believes there was such a Person as Jesus, that he preached such a Doctrine, led such a Life, wrought such Miracles as he is recorded to have done, and yet, contrary to his own Conviction, saith, that this Jesus did these extraordinary Works by the Power of the Devil, such a Man hath blasphemed the Holy Ghost in the same Kind, tho' not with the same Circumstances that the Pharisees did. Farther, if any one do ascribe the mighty Works that were done by the Apostles, and the other first Christians, by Virtue of the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon them, which were as great and as convincing as the Miracles our Saviour himself wrought; I say, if any one do ascribe those to the Devil, being convinced of the Truth of the Matter of Fact;

Fact; such an one also blasphemes the Holy Ghost in the same Kind, tho' in different Circumstances, as the Pharisees did.

Fourthly, All Atheistical Persons, that deny the Being of God or Providence, and scoff at all Religion, and would make others believe that it is a mere Cheat and Imposture; tho' they are not guilty of the Sin against the Holy Ghost, because they do not believe the Miracles of our Saviour, yet they have sinned as much, or more, against their natural Light, and are guilty of as great, if not greater Blasphemy than the Pharisees were, namely, the Blasphemy against God the Father: And, consequently, their Sin will be as unpardonable, or more unpardonable than theirs.

Fifthly, A total Apostacy from the Christian Religion, and going over to the Enemies of it, is of all other Sins the nearest to the Sin against the Holy Ghost; and may, sometimes, prove the very same: And accordingly, as severe Things are said against this Sin by the Apostles, as are said against the Blasphemy of the Holy Ghost, by our Saviour.

Sixthly, There are other Sins, which, tho' they are not of so horrid a Nature as this I now mentioned, yet have in them a natural Tendency towards this great unpardonable Sin we are speaking of. And therefore every one that has any Regard to his Soul, ought more especially to beware of them.

them. Such are profane drolling upon Religion, turning into Ridicule the Holy Scriptures, the Matter of Faith: And, lastly, Infidelity, and not believing and owning Christ's Religion, notwithstanding all the Evidence we have of the Truth of it. These, it is true, are none of them directly Blasphemies against the Holy Ghost, but they have some Affinity with it: And a sad Account have those Persons that are guilty of them, to make at the Day of Judgment, unless they prevent it by a timely Repentance.

But, *Seventhly* and lastly, It appears plainly from the Account we have now given, that those Sins that do most trouble and afflict the Consciences of Christians, as taking them to be the Sin against the Holy Ghost, are far from being what they take them to be; nay, are of a quite different Nature. The general Opinion that People among us have of the Sin against the Holy Ghost, is this, that it is any great, wilful, deliberate Sin, committed against Conscience, after a full Conviction, when the Spirit of God in their Hearts testified that they ought not to do this Wickedness. All these kind of Sins are indeed bad enough, and will as certainly damn us, without Repentance, as the Sin against the Holy Ghost. But yet it is plain, from the Account I have given of that Sin, that they are no ways akin to it, but of a quite different Nature. For the proper Notion of that Sin, as I have often said, is the affirm-

affirming our Saviour's Miracles to be Magical and Diabolical; which, it is to be hoped, those that commit these deliberate Sins, are far from doing. There is another Notion of the Sin against the Holy Ghost, that obtains among some, which is far more unlikely than this I have mentioned; but it is to be confessed, that it is only those that are deeply afflicted with Hypochondriack Melancholy that do entertain it. It is this, that wicked, and atheistical, and blasphemous Thoughts are the Sin against the Holy Ghost: But I would ask such, Do they encourage these Thoughts, or no? Do they delight in them, or do they vent them as the fixed and settled Sentiments of their Minds, and that too designingly and maliciously? If they do not, (as I dare say, of all others those that thus complain are least likely to do) they may be assured that they are far from having committed the Sin against the Holy Ghost. Nay, perhaps, (as the Case may be) from having committed any Sin at all. Another Notion taken up about the Sin against the Holy Ghost by some People, is, that it is not a complying with the good Motions that are sometimes made to their Souls by the Spirit of God. But there is no Occasion to give any further Answer.

I have gone thro' all the Points I proposed to discourse on upon this Text. I have no more to add, but that it would please God, who

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who hath brought us to the Knowledge of the Truth, to the Belief of his Son, and his Miracles and Doctrines, to establish and confirm us every Day more, and more in that Knowledge and Belief, that we may never fall away from him, or affront the Holy Spirit, nor ever dishonour his excellent Religion with a loose, vicious, unchristian Life.

This God of his Mercy grant, &c.



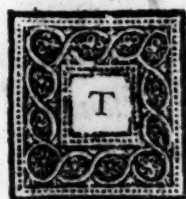
SERMON



S E R M O N XII.

I C O R. X. 31.

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.



HE doing all our Actions to the Glory of God, is the great Duty, and ought to be the great Business of our Lives; and accordingly, among all Sorts of Pretenders to Religion, there is nothing more talked of than that, and yet perhaps it is a Point that is often misunderstood. For which Reason I shall at this Time make it my Business to inquire into the true Notion and Importance of this great Point, and to give some Account of those Cases that are usually put about it.

To do our Actions to the Glory of God, is to do our Actions so, as that God may be glorified by them. Now, how that is to be done, we may have a great deal of Light from St. Paul's Discourse in this Chapter. He had spent the greatest part of it in resolving some Cases of Conscience, about eating

ing those Things which had been offered in Sacrifice to Idols; in what Cases it was lawful to a Christian to eat of them, and in what Cases it was utterly unlawful: And again, when it was lawful, in what Cases it was convenient for a Man to use his Christian Liberty, and in what Cases it was convenient he should not use it, upon Account of the Weakness of other Mens Consciences. And the Result of all his Instructions and Advices, concerning these Points, is comprized in the Words of my Text, and those that follow: *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the Glory of God. Give no Offence neither to the Jew, nor to the Gentile, nor to the Church of God: Even as I please Men in all Things, not seeking my own Profit, but the Profit of many, that they may be saved.* The Sense of which Words is plainly this: That whenever Christians were invited to that sort of Feasts he had been speaking of, that not only as to their eating and drinking, but in all the other Actions of their Life, the great Rule they were to walk by was this, of doing Honour to God, and advancing his Religion in the World. And therefore let them have a care of giving Offence, or putting a Stumbling-Block before any: Let them have a Care of doing any Action that might discourage the Brethren in their Profession of Christianity, or encourage the Heathen to continue in their Idolatry, for all such Actions were a dishonouring

nouring of God; but let them endeavour all possible Ways, by their Innocence and Virtue, and their prudent and charitable Behaviour, to adorn the Doctrine of God in all Things, and by that Means to recommend it to all about them.

From hence now it appears pretty plain, that this Precept of glorifying God in our Actions, or doing our Actions to the Glory of God, hath this general Sense and Meaning: That we take care to live according to Christ's Religion, and that none of our Actions be contradictory to it, or cast a Blemish upon it, and thereby hinder others either from continuing in it, or coming over to it: But on the contrary, that we use our utmost Diligence to frame our Conversations in such a Way as may both shew us to be sincere, conscientious Christians ourselves, and may likewise tend to the Honour and Advancement of Christianity ~~and~~ others. In a Word, *in* we then glorify God, according to St. Paul, when we are as good as we can, and do as much Good as we can.

This, I say, to me seems to be the true Notion of doing our Actions to the Glory of God, as would farther appear, if it was needful to insist on it, both from several other Passages of Scripture, and likewise from the Reason of the Thing. As for Scripture, I will only take Notice of two Passages; one is that of our Saviour, in the xvth of St. John, the 8th Verse, where he tells his Disciples,
Hereby

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Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit; so shall ye be my Disciples. If they had asked him this Question on purpose, how or by what Means a Man might bring Glory to God, or do his Actions to the Glory of God; he could not have given a more direct Answer to such a Question, than he hath done in these Words: *Hereby is my Father glorified, that ye bear much Fruit*; as much as to say, the true Way of glorifying God, is to abound in all the Fruits of a holy and Christian Conversation.

The other Text I shall name, is that of St. Paul, *Phil. i. Vers. 8. 10, and 11: I pray, saith he, that your Love may abound more and more, that ye may be sincere and without Offence, being filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, which are by Christ Jesus unto the Glory and Praise of God.* Nothing can be more plain from hence, than this, that we then advance the Glory and Praise of God, when our Love towards others does abound, when we are sincere and without Offence, being filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, which the Gospel of Christ obliges us to. Nor is this only the Scripture Account of the Thing, but the very Notion which Nature and Reason will suggest to us. For pray what is the Glory of God, if we go to the very Strictness of the Expression, but the Manifestation of himself to his Creatures, the Communications of his Excellencies and Perfections to others besides himself, to others that

that had no Being of themselves, but were made by him.

This is the Glory of God, and therefore by unavoidable Consequence it follows, that these Creatures, these Beings to which God manifests himself, to which he communicates his Perfections, do then glorify him, or do their Actions to his Glory, when they live suitable to those Ends for which he created them: That is, when they live in Obedience to his Laws, and endeavour as much as they can, to make all their Fellow Creatures do so too. It is impossible we should give any Glory to God in any other Sense: For, alas! we can add nothing to him, we cannot in the least augment his infinite Happiness and Perfections with all our Skill and Industry. He would from all Eternity have been as great, and as powerful, and as wise, and as just, and as holy as he now is, tho' none of us had been in Being. But since it pleased his infinite Goodness to create an innumerable Company of Beings to partake of his Fulness, and Happiness, and Perfections, as this Act of his was Glory in him, or to his Glory, or rendered him glorious; so in our living up to the Ends we were made for in our being like God, and copying out his Perfections in our own Minds, in our loving him and obeying him, and having the same universal Love and Kindness to all the Creation that God hath to us; in this, I say, consist all the Returns of Glory that we can make to him, all the glorifying of him,

or shewing forth his Glory, that we are capable of.

It was his Glory that he made us, and designed us for excellent Purposes; and we then, according to our Scantlings, return Glory to him, when we serve those Purposes he made us for, by living religiously ourselves, and advancing his Religion all the Ways we can in the World. This, I say, in the very Nature of the Thing, is all the Notion we can have of doing our Actions to God's Glory; and thus indeed it was that our Saviour glorified God while he was in this World, as he declares in the xviith of St. *John*, the 4th Verse; *Father, (saith he) I have glorified thee upon Earth; and how was that? Why he adds, I have finished the Work thou gavest me to do.*

Having thus explained my Text, and fixed the Notion of doing all our Actions to the Glory of God, that which I have now to do is to make some useful Inferences from what has been said, both with relation to our Instruction and our Practice. And,

First of all, From hence we learn what the Things are that are necessary to be observed by every one that means to do all his Actions to the Glory of God.

And they are two; *First*, That he doth so intirely devote himself to God, as to make his Service the great and principal Business of his Life. For if the glorifying God consists in living up to the Ends of our Creation,

ation, and doing him and his Religion the best Service we can possibly; then it is certain no Man can glorify God as he ought to do, that doth not make this the main End, or that hath any Interests to pursue that are dearer to him than Religion and Virtue. I do not say it is necessary, in order to the observing the Precept of the Text, that a Man by every Action that he doth, should intend and design the Glory of God; for I shall shew by-and-by, that that is not required: But this I say is necessary, that a Man should have such a constant Sense of God and Religion upon his Spirit, as that it shall influence and govern all the other Projects of his Life. So that he shall always be in a Condition of truly saying, I am God's, and not my own: I am devoted to his Service, and the main Business of my Life shall be to approve myself to him; nor will I engage in any Design that is inconsistent with this.

In the second Place, as a Man, in order to the doing his Actions to the Glory of God, must thus honestly fix his general Principles and Designs; so will it be also necessary that he take Care of his particular Actions: At least thus far, that he never do any Action that he knows is sinful or contradictory to the Laws of God. For indeed, as the only Way we have of glorifying God, is to keep his Laws, so the only Way that we can dishonour him, is by breaking them. And therefore, whatever a Man's Principles be, if he

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consent to the doing of any evil Thing, he is so far from glorifying God at that Time, that as the Apostle expresseth it, in the iud of the *Rom.* *By breaking his Laws he dishonours him.* But of this likewise I shall have Occasion to speak more by-and-by. In the mean Time this I lay down, and I desire it may be remembered, that whoever takes Care of the two Things I have now mentioned; that is to say, so fixes the great Design of his Life, that he makes it his main Business to serve God; and likewise so order his Actions, that he doth not thereby transgress any known Law of God; such a Man cannot fail of observing the Precept in my Text, of doing his Actions to the Glory of God.

The second Inference I draw from what has been said, is this: If this Notion of glorifying God, which I have laid down, be admitted, then there will be an easy Solution given to some Difficulties, which have not a little exercised both the Wits of disputing Men, and the Consciences of the Scrupulous. There are three of this Nature, which I shall briefly touch upon.

First of all, it has been a great Question, Whether a Man is not by Virtue of this Precept bound so to prefer the Glory of God before all other Considerations, as to be well contented and satisfied, even with his own Damnation, if that did really tend to God's Glory. For, say they, if God's Glory be our highest End, then we ought to be well pleased

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fed with every thing that makes for that End; and if our own Destruction do advance God's Glory, we have little Love to God, if we be not well contented he should deal so with us.

Thus some very seraphical Men do talk. But it is a very hard Doctrine, and yet withal very hard to be disputed against: But the Comfort is, if the Notion that I have now laid before you be true, there will need no disputing against it; for it will of itself fall to the Ground: It will be an idle Thing for any Man to dispute such a Question, or to trouble himself about an Answer to it. For, as I have shewn, to endeavour the Glory of God, and to endeavour our own Salvation, is perfectly the same Thing. There is no Difference at all between them; and in the same Degree, and by the same Ways that we can be said to promote our Salvation, or to avoid Destruction, in the same Degree, and by the same Way we advance God's Glory. So that were it not for the Over-fruitfulness of some Mens Heads, in framing Distinctions where there needs to be none, there could be no Competition at all between these two Things.

The second Question that is usually put with reference to this Point, and which is much like the former, is this: Whether a Man be not so purely to regard the Glory of God in all his Actions, as to have no Consideration of himself, or of any Benefit that he

shall receive by his Service of God; or if he did serve God with Prospect of being rewarded by him, whether is not this an Argument of a selfish mercenary Soul, one that is not yet arrived to the Gospel Spirit?

To this Question, as it is much of the same Nature with the former, the same Answer will serve. We ought not to make any Distinction between God's Glory and our own Happiness, as this Question supposeth. What God hath joined together, let no Man put asunder. To glorify God, and to work out our own Salvation, as I have shewed, is the very same Thing, only under a different Consideration; by doing either of the Things we do both of them. And therefore there can be no Doubt that it is lawful, and will be acceptable to God to design or intend either of them; since by so doing, if we go thro' the Work, both of them will have their Effect.

— God hath so contrived Things, that if I do but love myself heartily, and out of that Self-Love do endeavour all the Ways I can to promote my own future Happiness; this very Self-love, and this Endeavour to do myself Good, shall be the most effectual Way, nay the only Way to promote and advance his Glory. And on the other Side, if it can be supposed that I have no Concern for myself, but lay all my Designs, and do all my Actions purely out of Respect to God, without any Consideration of my own Interest; yet this will effectually be most for my own Good at the

the last ; for we then serve ourselves in the highest Degree we are capable of, when we love God as much as possibly we can.

But that it is indeed very allowable in any Christian to serve God out of a Prospect of receiving Advantages to himself thereby, cannot in the least be doubted : For if this be not admitted, what possible Account can we give of the Method that God himself hath thought fit to pitch upon for the bringing us to Salvation ? The Way by which God hath been pleased to deal with Mankind, is to propose Rewards to them for the exciting them to be obedient to his Laws ; and to denounce Punishments for deterring them from Sin ; and this is the great Design of all his Revelations, the main Business of the whole Scriptures is authoritatively to declare to us from God, that if we will serve him, we shall be happy ; but if not, we shall be miserable. Now, if it was not allowable for us to make use of these Considerations as Motives to incline us to that which is good, and Arguments to fright us from that which is evil, the Scriptures would be the most empty Piece of Pageantry in the World ; and all the Work we make with Encouragements, Promises and Threatnings, would be a mere idle Noise that signified nothing.

Nay, in the second Place, so far need we be from fearing that our Religion is selfish upon this Account, that in the Practice of it we look upon our Benefit and Advantage,

that I believe we may truly say, that our Saviour himself, when he was here upon Earth, did in some measure act upon the same Principle; for it is told us expressly by St. Paul, in the xiiith of the *Heb.* that Christ himself, for or in *Consideration of the Joy that was set before him*, (that is to say, the Rewards that his human Nature should receive for his Sufferings) *endured the Cross, despising the Shame, and is now for ever set down at the right Hand of God*: And in the Chapter before, where he is commemorating and applying the noble and great Actions of the Patriarchs, and what mighty Trials they underwent for the Cause of God, he tells us particularly, *That those great Things they did and suffered, because they had Respect to the Recompence of Reward*. And therefore surely that which the Apostle allowed and commended in them, will be no great Blemish or Disparagement to us, if we practise it now. But then, Thirdly, let me add this farther upon this Head, Whoever is once heartily religious (upon what Principle soever he become so) will not, cannot be of a slavish mercenary Spirit: For he will not love himself only, but he will heartily love God too. He will love God for himself, and he will love Virtue and Goodness for itself, because he is infinitely satisfied that these Objects are lovely in themselves, and that God hath done the greatest Kindness to Mankind that is possible, in recommending them to Man's Choice,

Choice, and Affections, and Pursuit. So that at the same time that he loves himself, he will love God as well as himself, because he knows it is in the Nature of Things eternally impossible for him to be any further happy, than he hath a Participation of God and his Nature. And as for the Curiosity of distinguishing whether it be precisely the Love of God, or the Love of himself, that puts him upon doing good Actions, he will not trouble himself about it. Nay, if he should be so critical as to examine himself concerning this Point, it is impossible he should be able to discover which, or to give any Answer to the Question. For in his Consideration, the Love and Service of God, and his own Happiness, are so involved and wrapt up together, that he cannot make a Distinction between them.

A third Question which is frequently put upon the Occasion of this Text, is this: Whether in every Action we do, we ought not to have a particular Respect or Attention to the Glory of God in that Action, because it is said by the Apostle, *That whether ye eat or drink, ye must do all to the Glory of God.*

To this I easily answer, from the Grounds before laid down. It is not said we must think of God's Glory in every Thing we do, but that we must do all our Actions to the Glory of God. Now that is certainly done, as I said before, when all our Conversation is just, and honest, and virtuous, and proceeds from

from a good Principle, and tends to the Honour of our Religion, but no way to the Disparagement and Scandal of it. This is to glorify God, and this only.

Taking now this for granted, we may assuredly both eat and drink, and do whatever we do to the Glory of God, even at the same Time that we have no actual Thoughts of this, but have quite other Considerations in our Heads: As for Instance;

When we are following our Employments and Callings, we do glorify God in these Instances, as far as such Instances are capable of advancing God's Glory; if in our Dealings with those that are concerned with us, we do behave ourselves sincerely, and uprightly, and conscientiously, tho' yet we have not at that Time, when we are thus managing our Business, any distinct Respect to the giving Glory to God in what we do.

When we are at a Feast, and set down at a Meal, we do truly give Glory to God in that Action, if our Discourse and Conversation be sober and modest, and agreeable to the Christian Rules; and if withal we do eat and drink temperately, so as not to prejudice our Health, or our Business, tho' we have no other Design of Religion in our Heads at that Time.

Thus again, when we give Alms, we do sufficiently secure the Glory of God by pitying a poor Man, and relieving his Necessity, tho' we have no other Respect or Consideration,
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And thus, in the last Place, when we set ourselves to our religious Offices, for Instance, to the Exercise of Prayer and Devotion, we need not in the least doubt, but that when we approach to God with an honest Heart, sensible of our own Vileness, and of the great Needs we stand in of his Mercy and Grace, and so pray heartily to him for it, tho' we design nothing more hereby at this Time than our own Benefit, and the Performance of our Duty; yet this is a glorifying God in this Action, as much as the Action will bear.

And so we may say of all particular Actions of human Life, that are done as they should be done; it is sufficient to entitle them to the Honour of being done to God's Glory, if they be regularly done, and pursuant to the main Design of our Religion; which is the same Thing with the Glory of God.

But if this will not satisfy a scrupulous Person, let us put a familiar Case in another Matter, which will perhaps give some Satisfaction, when the dry Reason of the Thing will not.

The Christian Life is often compared in Scripture to a Journey; and with great Reason, since St. Paul hath told us, *that we are all here in the State of Pilgrims and Travelers, and have no abiding continuing City, but are seeking one to come.* Taking now the Christian Life under this Notion, here comes

comes the Case : Is every Man that takes a Journey bound at every Step he makes in his Way to think of his Journey's End ? Must he be continually under a Necessity of exercising his Thoughts and Meditations upon the great Design for which he took that Journey, or otherwise he cannot make any Progress in it ? No certainly ; as long as he travels on, and takes the right Path, and neither goes backward, nor to the right Hand, nor to the left ; tho' he may in his Passage entertain himself with several Thoughts and Fancies ; tho' he may have in his Mind twenty little bye Designs, which have little Relation to his main Business ; yet, I say, so long as he pursues his main Design, and still goes forward in the right Road, no Body living will deny, that he is every Day advancing in his Way, and will at last, if he continues in this Course, safely arrive at the Place whether he is bound.

The Case is just the same as to the Matter we are speaking of ; the great End of the Christian Pilgrimage is the Glory of God, or which is all one, the Salvation of our Souls ; and we do not fail to serve this End, and to contribute to the Attainment of it, so long as we travel in those Paths of Righteousness and Virtue, which our Lord Jesus Christ hath chalked out to us ; but whether in every Step of our Christian Pilgrimage we do actually intend this, or intend it not, it is no great Matter, so long as our main Design is upon it, and we go on in the direct Road that leads to it.

But

But let us leave these Questions, and come to some other Inferences from this Doctrine : In the third Place, if this Account we have given of glorifying God be true, if it be the Glory of God that all Men should be good, and do Good, and that we then shew another his Glory, when we thus are, and thus do ; then it follows, that we ought to believe that God has a Kindness for every one of us ; and on the contrary, it is a great Derogation from his Glory, to think or teach that any of us are in our original Creation designed by God to be miserable, without respect to our evil Actions.

† I know it has often been said, that it is as much for the Glory of God, that some Beings should from Eternity be appointed Vessels of Wrath and Dishonour, (that is, the Objects of God's Hatred and Displeasure) as it is that others should be designed Vessels of Honour, and as such be made eternally happy : Not for any good or Evil that God did foresee one would do more than the other, but merely because he would have it so : For, say they, both these Things do equally manifest God's infinite and absolute Power, and Dominion, and Sovereignty ; and therefore they are both equally for his Glory. †

But I wish those that talk at this rate would a little better consider the Notion of God's Glory. Such a promiscuous indiscriminating Way of proceeding as this, may well enough become some sorts of Creatures, that

that would be arbitrary in all their Actions, and have no Sense of Law or Justice: But I am sure it can never suit with the Nature of the Holy Blessed God, who is infinitely benign, and just, and good; and who never dealt nor will deal with his Creatures, but in such a Way as they themselves shall at last, when their Eyes are opened, be satisfied is righteous, and fair, and equal. It may perhaps be the Madness and Insolence of some great Disturbers of Mankind, to make Wars, and create abundance of Miseries to poor harmless Creatures, for no other Cause but to enlarge their Dominion, and advance their Power and Grandeur: And this they may account their Glory. But how infinitely different is this kind of Glory, from that which God Almighty proposeth to himself? It is not in his Nature to do any thing but what is agreeable to the eternal Laws of Justice, and Reason, and Goodness, which are essential to his own Mind; and as far as the Scripture gives us an Account of him, he never did, nor doth, nor will act in an arbitrary Way with his Creatures: But his Government of the World in all Instances hath been and ever will be managed by infinite Goodness and Righteousness; and therefore these Opinions are heartily to be rejected by all that love God, and are zealous for his Glory, which do suppose that he hath made any Creature on purpose that that Creature should be eternally miserable, or which do suppose
that

that he is the Cause or the Author of Sin in any, either of Mankind or Devils.

Alas! in common Sense, how can such a Proceeding as this be for the Glory of God? We that are but poor precarious Beings, yet sure we have many of us better Notions of our own Glory than this comes to. Would we take it for an Advancement of our Honour or Grandeur, to tread upon a sorry Worm, or other Animal that should come in our Way, and so destroy its Being? It is true by this trampling on a Worm we shew what Power we have over that poor Worm: But will any Man of Sense think that we are a whit the more glorious for doing such a mighty Action? And if we poor silly Creatures have so much Sense as to despise a Man that would think to augment his Glory in treading upon a Worm, can we with Patience endure to hear it of Almighty God, who is a thousand times more above us, than the greatest of Kings are above the meanest Worms? I say, can we with Patience hear it said of God, that it is for his Glory to make a poor Creature to destroy him, or to trample upon any Being, and make it for ever miserable for this Reason, that his Power, and Greatness, and absolute Dominion, is hereby the more magnified and illustrated? But it will be said, Are there not some Persons that shall be saved eternally; and others that shall perish eternally, and this by God's Appointment? And since every Thing that God doth

is

is for his Glory, is not God glorified as well in the Damnation of the one sort, as in the Salvation of the other? To this I answer: There is no Doubt of it, God doth receive Glory as well from his Inflictions and Punishments, as from his Rewards: But this is not in the least inconsistent with that Notion of God's Glory that we have before laid down; nor, on the other Side, doth it give the least Countenance to the Doctrine we are now opposing. The Thing will be very evident by representing this Matter in another Form, and such a one as we all well enough understand.

Let us suppose a Sovereign Prince in this World, that hath all the Authority over his Subjects that a Man can have; it is in his Power to reward or punish, but when or how he thinks fit. What now is the End of this Power and Authority, that is thus vested in him? Is it to do what he pleaseth? Is it to dispose of the Lives and Fortunes of his People in an arbitrary Way? To prefer some to Honours and Dignities, and to decree others to Halts and Gibbets, without any Considerations of the Merits or Demerits of the Men? No certainly, no Man living will say, that the Prince's Office was given him for this End: His great Work is to govern his People to the best Advantage of them that it is possible. *He is the Minister of God to them for their Good*, as the Apostle tells us in the xiiith to the *Romans*. God hath made him

him an Instrument for the doing the greatest Good to those under his Charge, that he is capable of doing, or they capable of receiving; but he is not an Instrument of doing Mischief to the meanest of those that belong to him.

Well, now, this is his Duty, and this is his Office; and by governing his People in this Way, and to this End, he doth, in the best Manner that is possible, consult his own Honour and Glory. But here comes the Case: Some of his People are of such Tempers and Manners, that they will not submit to his Authority, nor obey his Laws, be they never so just and reasonable; but do most wicked, enormous Things, against all common Honesty and good Manners, and such Things as, if they be countenanced or encouraged, will quite destroy the Government, and with it the Good of the People. Is it not now fit that the Prince should punish these People in Proportion to their Crimes, or doth this in the least reflect upon his Goodness? No, certainly, not in the least. His Desire and his Design is to make all his Subjects as happy as may be: But there are some that will not be happy under his Government, but will do a great deal of Mischief both to themselves, and to all the rest of the Society. Those therefore he ought to make Examples of; and, by so doing, he is so far from acting arbitrarily, that indeed he would injure his Subjects, and shew himself to be weak, and unfit to govern, if he did not thus exert his Power of avenging,

as well as in other Cases he doth of rewarding. And it is as much for his Glory that he punisheth incorrigible Criminals that despise him and his Laws, as it is that he rewardeth faithful and worthy Subjects. And yet the Glory in both these Respects is the same; that is to say, it is the Glory of the Prince to do all the Good he can to his Subjects; and he cannot do that, unless he discourage and punish the Impudence of wicked Men, as well as encourage and reward those that are good.

And this is the true State of the Case between God Almighty and us: He doth not in the least design the Misery or Hurt of any of his Creatures: He means well to us all, as being the Father of us all, and would have us all to be happy; and this is his Glory. But if we will not obey his Laws, and so come to Happiness, he will yet glorify himself another Way, (that is, as the Sovereign Ruler and Judge of the World) by punishing us after our Deserts. And even this is a Pursuance of his doing Good to Mankind, wherein, as we have said, his Glory doth consist; because, without this Administration of Affairs, the Good of Mankind could not be secured.

But, Fourthly, Another Inference I draw from this Point, is this; How much do they dishonour God Almighty, and act in Contradiction to this Precept in my Text, of doing all their Actions to his Glory, that either think

think to advance God's Glory by doing ill Actions, or that colour over their ill Actions with the specious Pretences of doing them for God's Glory? What can be an Affront to God, and his Glory, if both these be not so?

God is then glorified, as we have often said, when we are good, and do good, when we live like Christians, and in all our Actions have an awful Regard to our Duty: But now what can be more opposite to this, than either to break God's Laws with a Design to glorify him thereby, or to pretend the glorifying of him, when yet we are only carrying on our own wicked Designs? The latter indeed of these is much the worse of the two, but yet they are both very bad; and yet, as bad as they are, God knows, the Practice of them has been too common in all Ages; the World, by sad Experience, has found the Effects of them. How many Men, out of good Designs, have done very evil Things? Hence come all the counterfeit Books for the Advancement (as the Contrivers of them intended) of the true Religion; hence come the fabulous Miracles of Saints; and twenty other pious Frauds, and religious Cheats, (we may call them in *English*) under which a great Part of Christianity at this Day groaneth.

But of the latter sort of Hypocrisy the Instances are innumerable; Nothing has been more common, than for Men to carry on their

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covetous, or revengeful, or ambitious Designs, under the specious Pretence of promoting Religion, and advancing God's Glory. Indeed, most of the Wars, or Tumults, and Rebellions, and Insurrections, and Conspiracies, and Massacres that have happened in Christendom, have been begun and carried on, and had their Successes from these Pretences. So that *Luther* was not much in the wrong, when he said, *In Nomine Domini incipit omne Malum*. The greatest Mischiefs and Wickednesses come recommended to us under the Name of Religion, and the Glory of God.

But, oh, how intolerable is all this kind of Practice! The worst Things that can be spoken against it, are not bad enough. If a Man would set himself on Purpose to dishonour God, and to bring a Scandal on his Religion, I do not know how he could do it more effectually, than thus to do unrighteous and wicked Actions, for the Sake, or under a Pretence of Piety and Christianity. A Man ought not to make the least false Step in Morals, ought not to commit the least Sin, for the carrying on the best Cause in the World. Be his Intentions never so pure; be the Glory of God, and the Advancement of true Religion, never so much in his Eye; yet all this will not sanctify one evil Action, one wilful Transgression of any Law of God; and therefore much less will it sanctify Rapine, and Thefts, and Sacrilege, and Murder,

der, and Rebellion, and Treason, and such other infamous Crimes.

To conclude all: If we will truly do our Actions to the Glory of God, let us, in the First Place, endeavour to possess our Minds most firmly with a Sense of the Holiness, and Kindness, and Benignity of the Divine Nature; and acquaint ourselves wholly with the Purity, and Simplicity, and Goodness of Christ's Religion; and let us so far consider these Things, as to be heartily persuaded we can never do any Honour or Glory to God, but by living up as exactly as we can to all his Laws, and doing all the Credit and Reputation to his Gospel, that, in our Station, we are capable of. And therefore let us propose it to ourselves as the great Design of our Lives, to serve God, and to be good, and to do good; to be as exemplary in our Lives, and as useful in our Generations, as we can: but, above all Things, let us be infinitely careful that we never pretend Religion to serve a secular Turn, nor ever do an ill Action for the promoting the best Designs in the World: I say, let us do our Endeavours to perform these Things; and to our Endeavours let us add our constant Prayers to God for his Grace and Spirit to enable us to perform them; and then I dare confidently pronounce, whatever Infirmities and Frailties we may be otherwise attended with, we shall live up to the Rule that is here given us by *St. Paul*; that

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is to say, *Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the Glory of God.*

To which God, in three Persons, Father Son, and Holy Ghost, &c.



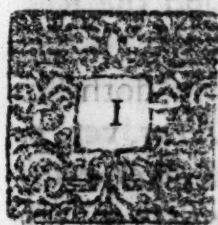
SER.



S E R M O N XIII.

R O M. XII. Part of the 2d Verse.

— *Be ye transformed by the Renewing of
your Minds.*



Design at this Time to treat of the Doctrine of Regeneration, and to speak to some of those Questions and Cases upon this Subject, which I have often found very well-disposed Persons to be uneasy under, for want of a Resolution about them: For this Reason I have now pitched upon this Text.

And here, in the Entrance of my Discourse, it is fit I take notice, that the being transformed by the Renewing of our Minds which is here spoken of, tho' it be commonly understood to be the Whole of Regeneration, yet it is really but one Part of it, tho' indeed it be the principal Part,

For Regeneration, or the New Birth, consists of two Parts, an outward Baptism, which includes a Profession of Christ's Religion, and an inward Sanctification or Holiness of Heart and Life. This is expressly told us,

both by our Saviour and by *St. Paul*. By our Saviour, in the *iiid* of *St. John*, where he tells *Nicodemus*, first of all in general, That *except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God*. And in the next Words he explains himself wherein this new New Birth doth more particularly consist; *Except a Man* (saith he) *be born of Water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God*. So that to a Man's being born again, there must go both the Baptism of Water, and the Renewing of the Spirit.

And exactly to the same Purpose doth *St. Paul* express himself in the *iiid* of *Titus*, ver. 5. *God* (saith he) *according to his Mercies hath saved us, not by Works of Righteousness, which we have done, but by the Washing of Regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost*. *The Washing of Regeneration*, there, is the outward Part of it: *The Renewing of the Holy Ghost*, there, is the inward.

I wish those that are offended at our Church for teaching, in her Offices, that Infants are regenerated by Baptism, would a little more have considered of this. I am sure both Scripture and Antiquity speak in this Language.

The Truth is, this Term of Regeneration, or the New Birth, hath such a Respect to Baptism, that it cannot be well understood without taking that in.

Our Saviour, no Doubt, took this Expression from the Jews, as he did abundance of others; and that which they meant by it, was
nothing

nothing else but a Man's becoming a Profelyte to their Religion, and being admitted thereto by Baptism. For Baptism among them, as well as among us, was the Way of receiving Profelytes into the Church; tho' indeed, to one Sort of Profelytes, they made Circumcision necessary, as well as Baptism. And whoever thus came over from Heathenism to the Profession of the God of *Israel*, and was thus admitted into the Jewish Church, I say, every such Person was said to be *recens natus*, new born, or regenerate. Nor was this only an empty Word among them, but it had real Effects; for they accounted a Profelyte to be, to all Intents and Purposes, so new-born, that they judged him, from henceforward a perfect Stranger to all his natural Relations, even to that Degree, that he might lawfully marry with such Persons as, before his being a Profelyte, he could not, by reason of Consanguinity or Affinity, contract Matrimony with. (See Dr. *Lightfoot*, and others.

Now we have great Reason to believe that our Saviour used this Term in the Sense they did; and when he declares, that *except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God*; that which he means to express hereby, was the absolute Necessity that there is upon every one, both Jew and Gentile, to become a Profelyte, a Disciple of His; and, as such, to be admitted into his Church, if he meant to go to Heaven. It must be owned,
that

that our Saviour took more into his Notion of Regeneration, than the Jews did; for, amongst them, an outward Baptism, and an outward Profession, was sufficient to entitle a Man to the Name of New-born: But our Saviour farther requires a Man's being born of the Spirit, as well as the being born of Water, in order to his entring into the Kingdom of Heaven; that is to say, besides the outward Baptism, and the outward Profession, there must be an inward Principle of Virtue and Holiness wrought in the Professor, by the Spirit of God: But yet this doth not hinder but that both these Things may go together; nay, it is certain they will always go together, unless a Man himself put a Bar to it: For whoever hath the outward Regeneration of Baptism, will also have the inward Regeneration of the Spirit, if he be not false to God and himself. God's Spirit doth always accompany God's Ordinances; and therefore I think it dangerous to separate the outward Regeneration from the inward.

But it is not the outward Part of Regeneration that I am now concerned with; tho' I wish that several of the Sects among us would a little more concern themselves with it: It is the inward Part of it I am now to treat of; that which the Apostle, in my Text, very significantly expresses by the being *transformed by the Renewing of our Minds*. Now the Inquiry here is, what the Apostle means by this Expression? Why, for that you cannot
be

be at a Loss, if you please to look at the foregoing Words, to which these are put by way of Antithesis. This Verse, of which my Text is a Part, begins thus ; *Be not conformed to this World, but be ye transformed by the Renewing of your Minds.* Now, if we know what Conformity to the World is here forbidden, we may certainly know what Transformation, or Renewal of our Minds, is here required.

As for the Conformity to the World, that is here forbidden, I believe no Body thinks there is any more intended by this Prohibition, than only a sinful Compliance with the Customs of the World ; a framing of our Lives and Manners after the impious Practices and Examples that we see frequently represented before us ; an indulging ourselves in such bad Courses as the Men of the World do too often give themselves Liberty in.

Taking, now, this to be the true Notion of being conformed to the World ; then the being transformed by the Renewing of our Minds, which is put in Opposition to it, must denote our being acted with more heavenly and divine Principles, and framing our Conversation in such a Way as is suitable to the Profession of Christianity, which we have taken upon ourselves : It must denote such an holy Disposition and Frame of Soul, as doth effectually produce a Conformity of all the outward Actions to the Laws of the Gospel, to which the Law of Sin, and the Course of the World, is opposite.

St. Peter

St. Peter hath most fully expressed both these Parts of St. Paul's Exhortation, in the 14th and 15th Verses of the 1st Chapter of his 1st Epistle; *As obedient Children, (saith he) not fashioning yourselves according to the former Lusts in your Ignorance; (there is the being not conformed to the World :) but as he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of Conversation; (there is the being transformed by the Renewing of our Minds.)* This, I say, is the full Importance of St. Paul's Expression in my Text; as it is also all that is meant by the other Expressions we meet with in Scripture of this kind; such as, the *new Creature*; the *being born of God*; the *being led by the Spirit*; the *being created after the Image of God*; the *putting on the new Man*; and the like: All these Expressions, and whatever others you meet with in the New Testament of the same Sort, can signify no more than this, that to your Baptism, and Belief, and Profession of Christ's Religion, you add a sober, righteous, and godly Conversation; and this out of an honest, sincere, and holy Principle.

Having thus given an Account in general of the spiritual Regeneration, I now proceed to answer some Questions, and resolve some Cases, that are usually put about it. In speaking to which, we shall be let into farther Light, as to most of those Points that concern this Argument.

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The Questions that I shall treat of, are these Four:

1. Whether Regeneration be not so intirely the Work of God's Spirit upon a Man's Mind, as that he himself is perfectly passive in it, and can do nothing at all, either as to the forwarding or hindering of it in himself?

2. Whether any Man can be truly, that is, inwardly regenerate, that hath not, some time of his Life, experienced in himself a real Change or Transformation, as it is here called, of his own Mind from bad to good?

3. Whether this Change be not always performed so perceptibly, as that the Man himself can give a particuler Account both of the Time when, and the Manner how, it was wrought in him?

4. What are the Marks or Characters by which a Man may be able to judge of his own Regeneration; and what we are to think of those numerous Marks that are commonly given in this Matter?

I begin with the First, Whether Regeneration be not so intirely the Work of God's Spirit upon a Man's Mind, as that he himself is perfectly passive in it, and can do nothing at all either as to the hindering or forwarding of it?

I should not have thought of moving this Question, did not the Resolution of it very much concern our Practice; tho', at the first Sight, it looks like a Point of Speculation. For if a Man can contribute nothing at all to the

the Renovation of his own Mind, to what Purpose shall we employ any Thoughts, or use any Endeavours, about it? And what hath a carnal wicked Man to do, but to wait for the good Hour, when God shall touch his Heart in a powerful irresistible Way? and then the Work will be done to his Hands. To this Question, therefore, I give this Answer; That as to the first Part of it, it is true; namely, the producing in a Man that holy divine Frame of Soul, which is necessary to denominate him a regenerate Man, is intirely the Work of God's Spirit. Nor can any of the highest and most glorious Angels in Heaven work such a Cure upon the meanest Soul of the lapsed Sons of *Adam*, as this amounts to. It is only the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, that can renew the Image of God in fallen Man.

But then, though this be true, it is to be remember'd, that God always acts with Men in a Way suitable to their own Natures; and he having made them free Agents, capable of chusing or refusing, he always deals with them as such: And therefore it is in their Power either to accept and cherish God's Grace when he offers it, and then it shall have its Effects; or to refuse and despise it, and then, to be sure, it will be lost upon them: *They will receive the Grace of God in vain*, as the Apostle expresseth it. So that I make no Scruple of saying, That tho' Regeneration, or the Renewing of our Minds, be wholly the
Work

Work of God's Spirit, yet it is in a Man's Power either to hinder or to forward that Work in himself: Nay, I do not doubt but that all the Christian Professors among us, how bad soever they be, would be made Partakers of the Renewing of the Holy Ghost, as well as they are of the Regeneration of Baptism, did not they themselves put a Bar to it, by the obstinate Resistance of the Motions of God's Spirit within them, and the Neglect of the Means that he vouchsafes them for Grace and Salvation. As therefore, on one Side, every Man that finds this happy Work wrought in him, ought most humbly to thank God for it, and to ascribe it all to his free Grace and Mercy; so, on the other Side, it will concern every Man that is yet in a State of Sin and Wickedness, to use all Endeavours imaginable to get out of it as soon as he can; and, in order thereto, to call earnestly upon God for his Grace; and as he bestows it (as he certainly will, upon earnest Prayers) to close with it, and encourage it as much as is possible; otherwise there is little Probability that ever he should become a Convert to Virtue and Holiness.

Well, but it will be said, How can this consist with the Scripture Account of this Matter? Is not every Man, in his natural Estate, represented there as dead in Trespasses and Sins? And is not Regeneration the infusing a new Nature into a Man, and making him a new Creature? Now, would it not be
absurd

absurd to say that a dead Man can do any Thing towards the raising himself to Life, or that a Creature can do any Thing towards the new forming and creating of himself? I answer, That as absurd as it seems, yet it is the very Language of Scripture. Doth not God call upon *Israel*, in the xviiith of *Ezek.* ver. 31, to make themselves a new Heart, and a new Spirit? Doth not *St. Paul*, in the vth of *Ephesians*, ver. 14. speak to Sinners in these Terms, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the Dead, and Christ shall give thee Life?* Nay, doth he not in this very Text lay it before the *Roman* Christians as a Duty incumbent upon them, and as the Matter of his particular Request to them, that they would not be conformed to this World, but that they would be transformed by the Renewing of their Minds? What means all this, if Men were mere Stocks and Stones, and must be perfectly passive in this Business? No, assuredly; tho' it be God that creates the new Heart, tho' it be Christ that gives the Life, and tho' it be the Spirit that transforms the Mind, yet the Man himself hath something to do in this Work.

The Truth is, it is the misunderstanding these Phrases of Scripture, and straining them farther than they were intended, that is the Occasion of all these Mistakes about Regeneration. They will take the Term of Regeneration, or the New Birth, or the New Creature, in a literal Sense; whereas these Words

ought

ought only to be understood figuratively; that is to say, we are not to imagine that, for the producing these Effects which these Words import, there is a new Soul, or a new Mind, or a new Nature created in a Man, by the Spirit of God, which is the literal way of understanding these Words; but only thus, that the same Soul which before had a vicious Inclination, is now, by the Grace of God, virtuously disposed; that the same Mind which was before ignorant of the Things of God, and utterly averse to them, is now enlighten'd to a better Understanding of them, and doth more love and delight in them, than it did before; the Nature in the Regenerate and Unregenerate is the same; that is to say, it is the same human Nature that is common to all Men; but only in the one it is very much corrupted and depraved; in the other it is amended, and restored, in some measure, to its true Perfection and Liberty.

Thus, again; When the Scripture saith, that *we are all dead in Trespasses and Sins, and that God by Christ hath quickened us, and created us again to good Works*; these Words are not to be strictly understood, but only metaphorically; here is neither a proper Death, nor a proper Quickening, nor, last of all, a proper Creation: But all that is meant by these Terms, is this, that Mankind, thro' their original Degeneracy, and the evil Examples they saw before them, were gone so far

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in a Course of Sin, that there were no human Means left by which it was possible to gain them over to Holiness and Virtue. But God, by sending his Son, and giving them the powerful Arguments of the Gospel, and Assistance of the Holy Spirit, to fet home those Arguments, did that which, by the Strength of Nature alone, could not be done.

But enough on this Head; only let me tell you this before I leave it. That if we will needs interpret such Phrases and Words as these in a gross literal Sense, we shall intangle ourselves in as many Difficulties as the Papists have brought themselves into, by literally construing our Saviour's Words, *This is my Body*, to the Purpose of their Doctrine of Transubstantiation.

The Second Question I am to treat of, is this; Whether such a Transformation by the Renewing of our Minds, as the Text seemeth to imply, that is, a sensible Change from bad to good, be necessary to every Person; or whether some may not be truly in the Regenerate State, tho' they never experienced such a Change or Transformation in themselves?

This Question might indeed receive its Answer from what has been already said about the Notion of Regeneration in general; but, however, I will speak something more to it, because it is a Point that hath troubled some very good Persons. They know by the Scriptures, that Regeneration is absolutely
neces-

necessary to Salvation. They know, that except a Man be born again, be created anew, be transformed by the renewing of his Mind, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. And they likewise so understand these Expressions, that, in their Opinion, they must at least import a very great Change in a Man's Mind, and in his Actions. But now, in what a Condition are they? for they have never found such a Change in themselves; they have been always much in the same Frame and Temper of Mind that they are now in; they thank God they have ever had a hearty Sense of Religion, and they have endeavoured to serve God in that way of Christianity which they have been educated in, with great Sincerity; and God, in Mercy, hath preserved them from all great and open Violations of their baptismal Covenant. But still, where is their Regeneration? for they are but now what they have always been.

But to this Scruple of theirs, we easily answer; If a Man find in himself all the Effects of Regeneration, it is no great Matter whether they were wrought in him with a sensible Change of his Mind or Manners, or without one.

The great Business here to be considered, is, the State of Man's Soul. If that be acted with holy Principles, and those Principles shew themselves in a constant Course of virtuous Actions, which is that which we call the Effects of Regenerating Grace, or the

State of Regeneration, it is enough ; the Man may satisfy himself he is truly regenerate. But as for the Manner how he came into this State, or whether ever he was in a different Condition before, and so underwent a great Change before he was brought to this ; this is but a Circumstance of the Business, and needs not to be much regarded.

It must be acknowledged, that at the Time when our Saviour and his Apostles used these Words, they did import a remarkable Change in the Person to whom they were to be applied, such a Change as every one might be sensible of : And the Reason is this ; Christianity was then a new Religion, and all the World was to be converted to it, and none were then capable of being converted by the Apostles Preaching, but those that were come to Years of Discretion ; and the very Notion of their Conversion, was an actual renouncing of their former Religion, together with all their wicked and idolatrous Practices they had lived in, and giving themselves up entirely to the Discipline and Conduct of our Lord Jesus. Now, I say none could thus forsake one Religion, and go over to another, and leave such Practices and Customs which they were bred up in, and form their Conversation after a new and a stricter Way, but they must needs be sensible of a great Change both in their Principles, and in their Lives. And this is one great Reason why the Christian State of Life is described in such Terms

as Conversion, Transformation, the New Creature, and the like.

But now that Christianity is become the Religion of Kingdoms and Nations, and all Persons are baptized into it in their Infancy, the Case is quite different. For having by this Means the Advantage of a Christian Education, the Principles of that Religion will by Degrees be so instilled into us, that when we come of Age to chuse for ourselves, we shall, without any Violence or Difficulty, embrace the Doctrine of that Religion, rather than any other; and it will be unnatural and a Violence to be of any other Religion. And considering further, that the Grace of the Holy Spirit doth constantly go along with outward Ordinances, we cannot doubt but abundance of Persons are sanctified from their Infancy; and as they have embraced the Gospel from the Beginning, so have their Manners been suitable to it from the Beginning likewise.

Thus, I say, it often happens to Persons among us, tho' it could not be so when the Apostles of Christ first preached the Doctrine of Regeneration: Many of us are Holy and Regenerate from our Childhood; we were consecrated to God in the Infancy of our Lives; and as we grew up, the Grace of God was not wanting, thro' the Means of a religious Education, to sow the Seeds of all Virtue and Holiness in our Souls: And still as we further grew in Years, those Seeds came

more and more to Perfection: So that when we came to be Men and Women, we found ourselves without any sensible Change from bad to good, to have a prevailing Inclination to that which is good, and to bring forth all the Fruits of the Spirit in our Conversation. Now, in this Case, here is all that which is meant by Regeneration, tho' we have no Notice when or how we came into this State and Condition. Nay, indeed, here is Regeneration in that most proper and full Sense of the Word, as I before gave an Account of it; for here is both the outward Regeneration of Baptism, and the inward Regeneration of the Spirit going along with it.

But then this, as I have said, holds only as to those Persons among us that have always liv'd virtuously and innocently, and have never fully departed from their baptismal Vow. As for those that either thro' the Occasion of a bad Education, or by the abusing a good one, have engaged themselves in vicious Courses, and accordingly, from the Time they came to Years of Discretion, have lived in a State of Sin and Ungodliness; these Persons are not yet in the regenerate State, (if we speak as to the inward spiritual Part of it); and must, if ever they mean to be saved, some Time or other, undergo a real Change and Transformation both in their Principles, and their Course of Living.

The Third Question I am to speak to, is this; Whether the Change that is made in a
Man's

Man's Mind in Regeneration, be always perform'd so perceptibly, that the Man himself shall be able to give a particular Account both of the Time when, and of the Manner how it was wrought in him.

In Answer to this, I say, First of all, That this Question can only be put with Reference to the Persons that have formerly lived a careless vicious Life, and so must of Necessity undergo a Transformation of their Principles and Manners: For as for those that have been well-disposed from their Childhood, from what has been said before, it appears, that the Question is out of Doors as to them; so that it cannot be sound Divinity so to lay down the Nature of Regeneration or Conversion, as to make it necessary, in order to it, that every Man should be able to give an Account of the Beginning of it in himself.

But, Secondly; Even as to those that have sometimes been vicious, ungodly Persons, and now are so reformed, that they may have just Hopes that they are in a good Condition; even as to these, I say, it is not necessary that they should be sensible of so sudden or so extraordinary a Change in themselves, as to be able from such a Time, or such a Circumstance, or such a Providence that happened to them, to date their Conversion. My Reason is this; It doth not appear that, ordinarily speaking, especially in these Days of ours, the Work of Conversion or Regeneration is wrought in a Moment, or at once, but rather in some

Quantity of Time, and by many Degrees, Step, by Step, little by little. Those Men that have lived in a Course of Sin, (and all those that are to be transformed, must be supposed to be such) can hardly, I say, be imagined to put off their vicious Habits on a sudden, or in a Moment; but there must go a great many Actions, a great many Trials, and Endeavours, before that be accomplished: The old Habits must, by Disuse and Forbearance, be weaken'd, before the Man be capable of receiving new ones in the Place of them; and that very Thing will require great Meditation, and many Acts of Self-denial and Mortification. And even when a Man hath done this, yet still he is but in a Disposition to a new Habit; but before that Habit be effectually wrought in him, there will be still more Time required, more Study, more Resolution, and more repeated Acts of Virtue; and this we find true by constant Experience: As the Poet observes of bad Men;

Nemo repente fuit turpissimus, —

None ever grew extremely wicked of a sudden, but came to it by Time and Degrees; so it is of good Men, (those I mean that have once been bad, and come to good) they cannot in an Instant leap from one Extreme to the other, but must pass thro' several intermediate Stages and States, before the vir-
tuous

tuous Principle hath prevailed over the vicious.

Now this being so, it is not reasonable to think that every Convert to Holiness and Virtue should be able to give an Account of the precise Time when he became a Convert. He may, perhaps, if he has a good Memory, and has used himself to recollect his past Actions, he may, I say, be able to remember some of the great Occasions and Motives that first prevailed upon him to alter his Course of Living; and he may remember what Resolutions he formed upon this, and what Attempts he made, and what Trials he underwent, before he became Master of his Purpose; how often he had been defeated in his good Intentions, and had been overcome by Temptations, and fallen back into criminal Actions; so that he hath, in a Manner, been forced to begin again.

I say, all these Strugglings and Efforts, and various Successes, or at least a great many of them, he may remember; and withal, what gradual Advancements he hath made in Virtue and Religion, 'till that now at last he may with Comfort reflect upon himself, and his own Condition.

But now, let him remember these Things never so well, yet still it will be hard for him, after all this, to assign the precise Instant when he became a Convert, or the particular Time when he might justly be said to have passed from an unregenerate State to
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the regenerate. Nay, perhaps, tho' he be a very good Man; yet such may his Fears and Jealousies over himself be, that he is not assured that he is yet entered into a safe Condition.

The Point will be much clearer by putting this Instance: A Man languisheth under a long tedious Distemper of Body; he useth many Physicians; he follows their Advice, but yet he doth not quickly mend: Sometimes he is better, and sometimes he is worse; but with Time, and the Strength of Nature, and good Prescriptions, and regularly using himself, and God's Blessing upon these Things, he doth by Degrees get Strength, and recover of his Distemper, and at last finds himself to be in a good State of Health.

This Man now, that is thus recovered, can he be sensible of the precise Time that he became a sound Man after his Distemper? He can easily remember that such Physick was prescribed him, and that he made use of it, and that, after some Time, he grew better upon it; and, it may be, after that he relapsed, and, upon again consulting his Physicians, and following their Directions, he overcame his Relapses; and after many Pulls backwards and forwards, he thanks God that at last he is either perfectly recovered of his Distemper, or in a very hopeful Way towards it: All this now he is sensible of, and it is fresh in his Memory; but yet I doubt he will be hardly

hardly able to name the punctual Minute, no, nor the Day, nor perhaps the Week, when he could say upon good Grounds, I am cured of my Disease; I am a sound Man; I need not fear this Distemper any more. His Health came insensibly and gradually; and now, after he hath lost all the Symptoms of his Sickness, he may rejoice and hope well of himself; but it will be idle for him to say, Such an Hour I became a sound Man: And yet much more idle would it be in him, either to be so confident of his Health, as to lay aside all Fear of Danger for the future, or, on the other Side, to question, or doubt of his Health and good Constitution upon this Account, that he cannot name the Time, or the Manner, or the Circumstances, with which it was effected.

This Instance is so pertinent to our Purpose, and so plain, that I need not make any Application of it to the Case I have in Hand.

I come therefore to the Fourth and Last Question upon this Point, and that is, concerning the Marks and Signs of Regeneration. This has been a great Inquiry; and tho' I dare not say but that it is a very useful one, yet I doubt the Answer to it has not always been such as it should be.

I fear that some Persons, by their overgreat Forwardness to multiply Marks of Conversion, or Regeneration, have rather obscured the Thing, than clear'd it up; and have

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have often brought needless Scruples into Mens Heads.

The Point doth really lie in a little Room, and there lies no great Learning nor Subtlety to hit upon it.

The Business of Regeneration, as we now understand it, consists in this; a hearty Sense of God, and the Christian Religion, and a serious and constant Endeavour to live suitably to that Sense, in all our Conversation. So that if we will inquire for Marks of a regenerate Person, they ought only to be drawn from those Effects that a Man feels in himself. If a Man to his Baptism, and his Faith in Christ, and his Profession of the Christian Religion, doth join a serious Conformity to the Laws of Christ in all his Actions, and this out of Conscience, and as far as his Knowledge, and the Circumstances of his Life, and the natural Infirmities of human Nature will allow him; if he desire heartily, and resolve constantly, and endeavour sincerely to please God, and to save his own Soul, in all the Ways of Righteousness, and Sobriety, and Holiness that the Gospel hath prescribed to him; and these Desires, these Resolutions, these Endeavours of his, have such Effects, as that, in the Main of his Life, after he is come to this his Sense, he lives innocently, and avoids open, and known, and wilful Sins; and as to what Slips, and Frailties, and Omissions he may be guilty of, he is sensible of them, and begs God's Pardon for them, and strives

strives against them, and still rather grows better than worse, more inclined to Good, and more averse to Evil: This is the best Mark in the World; nay, I will say, it is the only Mark whereby one can discern that he is in a regenerate Condition, in a State of God's Favour; and that if he should die that Moment, he is safe, as to his Happiness in the other World.

But the Business of Regeneration, by the Multitude of Marks that have been set upon it, has been render'd a far more intricate and artificial Thing than this comes to.

I cannot say, but that in most of the Books and Discourses that do thus abound with Marks, there is so much Truth, that if they meet with a Reader, or Hearer, that can by Experience find them all made good upon himself, he needs not much fear the being deceived by them, but may from them make a safe Conclusion as to his own State. But then there is this Thing to be taken Notice of, that those numerous Marks that are given of a regenerate Person, (tho', if taken all together, they must be true; yet they) seldom all meet in one Person, and perhaps there are five to one of unquestionably sincere Christians, that do not find them all to concur in themselves; and yet, if you take them afunder, and pitch upon such and such Particulars of them, leaving out others, it is odds but they mislead you, and prove no Marks at all.

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That which I would say, is this; There are these two Inconveniencies in multiplying the Signs and Marks of Regeneration; one is, That oftentimes such Marks are given of it, as that a Man may be a very good Christian, and, without Doubt, a regenerate Person, and not find them in himself. Another Inconveniency is this; That such Marks are likewise given, that even a bad Man may experience them in himself, tho' some good Men cannot.

To prove this by Instance; There is nothing more usual among those that delight to lay down a great Number of Marks of Conversion, than to frame a solemn Description of the Manner of it, and to deliver the particular Way and Method in which it proceeds. And here usually they first bring in a Soul very careless and regardless of his eternal Interest, and very secure in his own Way, tho' it be a bad one: Afterwards they make this Person, either by some convincing Sermon he hath heard, or some reasonable Advice he hath had from some pious Friend, or by some Affliction or Judgment that God hath been pleased to visit him with; or, lastly, by some extraordinary Providence in some other Way; I say, by some or all of these Means, to be deeply awaken'd to a Sense of his former Sins, and the dangerous Condition he is in upon Account of them. And the first Effects that these warm Convictions do work upon him, are very terrible; he thinks himself in a
fearful

fearful damnable Condition, he looks upon himself as a lost undone Man: He hath the Terrors of the Law so deeply set home on his Spirit, that he can find Comfort nowhere; and tho' he turn himself all Ways imaginable, yet still he is a forlorn, miserable Creature. After he hath lain some Time under these Terrors and Affrightments, and even upon the Brink of Desperation, it pleaseth God, at length, by his Spirit, to break thro' this Cloud, and to dart some Beams of Light and Comfort into his Conscience. Finding himself to be lost every other Way, he is at last directed to fix upon Jesus Christ, as the only Anchor of his Hope; to close with him, to apply his Merits and Righteousness to himself; and, upon this, he lays hold on the Promises, and, renouncing all his own Works, and all his own Righteousness, and perfectly going out of himself, he relies and depends upon Jesus Christ, and Him only. And thus closing with, and resting upon Jesus Christ, is that justifying, saving Faith, upon Account of which God accepts and approves of him.

But then he doth not rest here, but goes farther; he is not only sensible of his former Guilt, and takes Shelter in the Merits of Christ, for the Forgiveness of it; but he resolves most heartily to become a new Man for the future.

This is the ordinary Process of Conversion, as you sometimes find it deliver'd in
Books.

Books. I do not represent it with a Design to expose it; for really this is sometimes the Method by which Men are converted: But yet this I say, that if this kind of Proceeding be set down, either as a necessary Mark, or as a certain Mark, whereby Men are to judge of their Regeneration, it will fail in both these Respects, and be found no Mark at all; for it will either discover too much, or too little: For it is certain, a great many very pious religious Persons never came to that good Estate they are now in, by any such Methods as we have now been speaking of. They were never exercised in such a boisterous Manner, with the Terrors of the Law (as they are called). They were never in such a despairing Condition. And that Satisfaction, and Peace of Mind they now enjoy, and that good Hope they have of God's Favour, never arrived to them in such a Way and Method as I have been describing.

And then, in the second Place, these Marks of Regeneration cannot be constantly true ones; because a great many may have felt in themselves all that I have now mentioned, and yet fall short of it. There is no Doubt but a very bad Man may have had all those Convictions upon his own Mind of his Sin, and the Danger we have now represented; nay, and all that disclaiming his own Righteousness, and closing with Christ's Promises, and applying his Merits to himself, that we have mentioned; nay, and farther, all that Abhor-

rence

rence of his own Ways, and such pious Resolutions as such an Abhorrence could work in him; and yet, for all this, he may not be a regenerate Person: For, after all these Convictions, and Resolutions, he may still continue under the Slavery of Sin, and evil Habits. Tho' he had a warm Sense of Religion at the first, yet that Sense, in tract of Time, and upon the Recourse of Temptations, may wear off and decay, and the Man at last comes to satisfy himself, that if he do but still rest on Jesus Christ, and now and then take solemn Times for the exercising Acts of Repentance, and Faith, and Devotion, this will be accepted of God, tho' yet he lives in a Course of Sin, and hath not truly mortified any one carnal or worldly Lust that formerly reigned over him.

God knows the World hath too much Experience of the Truth of this.

The Whole I have to say about this Business, is this; and I conclude with it:

It is not advisable for us to be curious about many ^{Marks} Works of our Regeneration; or when we deal in Books that treat of those Things, either to be much exalted, or much cast down, when we find some Marks there given either to agree with our State, or not to agree with it.

The truest Mark is that of our Saviour, *The Tree is known by its Fruits.* If a Man be baptized, and heartily believing the Christian Religion, doth sincerely endeavour to

live up to it; if his Faith in Jesus Christ be so strong, that, by Virtue thereof, he overcomes the World, and the evil Customs thereof: If knowing the Laws of our Saviour, he so endeavours to conform himself to them, that he doth not live in any known wilful Transgression of them, but in the general Course of his Life walks honestly and piously, and endeavours, in his whole Conversation, to keep a good Conscience, both towards God and Man; such a Man, however he came into this State, and with whatever Infirmities it may be attended, (of which Infirmities yet he is deeply sensible, and fails not both to pray and strive against them) yet he is a good Man, and gives a true Evidence of his Regeneration; tho' he have not all the Marks and Qualifications that he may meet with in Books.

And such a Man, if he persevere in the Course he is in, will, without Doubt, at last be justified before God, and find an Admission into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Whither God of his Mercy bring us all, &c.

SERMON



SERMON XIV.

JER. XVII. 9.

The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?



THE Deceitfulness of the Heart, is a Thing we oft complain of, and with too great Reason: But yet is often not rightly understood; and Mens Mistakes about it have sometimes brought upon them great Inconveniencies. Those Mistakes have chiefly been occasioned thro' the Misunderstanding this Text that I have read unto you; and therefore I have pitch'd upon that, rather than any other, for the Ground of my Discourse upon this Argument.

Five Things I here propose to do:

First: To clear up the Sense of my Text, by shewing what Sort of Deceitfulness of the Heart is here spoken of.

Secondly; To examine the commonly-received Doctrine concerning the Heart's Deceitfulness.

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Thirdly;

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The Fourteenth Sermon.

Thirdly; To give an Account of those Effects, which are generally attributed to the Deceitfulness of the Heart, but indeed proceed from other Causes.

Fourthly; To shew wherein the Deceitfulness of the Heart doth really consist. And,

Fifthly and lastly; To propose the proper Cure and Remedy of it.

Before I enter upon these Points, one Word by Way of Explication of what we mean by the Heart, and what may be meant by its being deceitful; for as for all the other Terms in my Text, they are sufficiently plain.

By the Heart, may be understood, either that Principle within us, from whence the Motions, and Designs, and Affections of our Minds do proceed; or we may understand by it, those inward Motions, and Designs, and Affections themselves.

In both these Senses the Heart is taken in Scripture. In the first Sense our Saviour speaks of it, when he saith, *Matth. xv. 19. That out of the Heart proceed evil Thoughts, Adulteries, Murders, and the like.* And so where-ever we meet with the Thoughts of the Heart, the Imaginations of the Heart, in such Passages the Heart is taken for the Principle. In the other Sense God speaks of the Heart, in that Passage, *This People draweth nigh to me with their Lips, but their Heart is far from me.* And so where-ever we meet with speaking Truth from the Heart, praising God

God with the Heart, God's knowing the Heart, and the like; in these Passages the Heart is taken for the Actions and Effects of that Principle, the inward Thoughts and Affections, and Inclinations. But this is so much a Nicety, that it is scarce worth taking Notice of; it is no Matter in which of these Senses we take the Heart in the Text, for indeed they come both to one Thing.

As for the other Term, Deceitful, when it is applied to the Heart, it is capable of two Significations; it may either signify, that the Heart is treacherous and fraudulent, and means to deceive, which is the proper Sense of the Word; or it may signify, that whether it means to deceive us or no, we are apt to be deceived by it: Thus, in common Speech, we say, a Man is a deceitful Man, not only when he designs to cheat us, or impose upon us, but when he fails us in that we relied upon him for, or when we can make no certain Judgment of him.

Now it is true, the Heart may be deceitful in both Senses, but yet with different Respect. The Heart of another Man may deceive me both Ways; that is, both by designing to abuse me; or, tho' he have no such Meaning, yet by disappointing me, if I trust to him. But my own Heart cannot be said to deceive me, save only in the latter Sense; that is, I may make a wrong Judgment of it, or may, by the Event, be deceived as to the Matter in which I trusted to it.

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Having premised this, I come to my First Inquiry ; What is the Prophet's Meaning, when he saith, *The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked? who can know it?*

Now as to that, I think these two Things are pretty clear: First of all ; That when he saith, *The Heart is deceitful*, he means it in the proper Sense of the Word ; that is to say, as it signifies fraudulent, false, hypocritical, covering foul Designs under fair Pretences. This appears both by the Word he here useth, (which is not capable of any other Construction ;) and likewise by that other Character of desperately wicked, which he here joineth with it. Now, if this be so, then no Mens Hearts are deceitful in the Prophet's Sense, but only the Hearts of bad Men, those that design to deceive ; and consequently, there is no Ground from hence to draw a general Conclusion, that all Mens Hearts are deceitful, and desperately wicked ; for the Hearts of honest Men are not so.

Secondly ; When the Prophet saith of such a deceitful wicked Heart as this, *Who can know it?* It is impossible his Meaning should be, that the Man whose Heart it is, doth not, or cannot know it ; for every one is certainly privy to all the Designs of his own Heart. But the Meaning is, that other Men cannot know it. The Man's wicked Intentions are so covered over with fair Appearances, that none but God can see through his Disguise ;

guise; as it follows in the next Verse, *I the Lord search the Heart.*

Now if this be the Prophet's Meaning, then it is plain, this Text doth no Ways relate to a Man's knowing, or not knowing his own Heart, but only to his not knowing the Hearts of other Men.

Taking now these two Observations along with us, we have nothing more to do for the finding out the true Meaning of this Text, than only to consider upon what Occasion it comes in.

The Design that the Prophet is here pursuing, was to beat off the *Jews* from placing their Confidence in Men, and to persuade them to put their whole Trust in God, and to depend upon him alone for their future Preservation. To this Purpose he tells them, (as you may see in the 5th Verse) *Cursed be the Man that trusteth in Man, and maketh Flesh his Arm, whose Heart departeth from the Lord, &c. But blessed is the Man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose Hope the Lord is; for he shall be as a Tree planted by the Waters, and that spreadeth out her Roots by the River, and shall not see when Heat cometh, but her Leaf shall be green, &c.* And then follow the Words of my Text, *The Heart is deceitful above all Things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?* What can be the Design of these Words, but only to inforce what he had said before, by giving a farther Reason, why they should place their Hope in
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God, and not in Men? And if we take them thus, an excellent Reason they do indeed contain: For how vain is it to trust in Men, whose Hearts we cannot see into; and who, tho' they may make a very fair Shew of Integrity and Virtue, yet have often mischievous and wicked Designs at the Bottom! Taking now the Text in this View, the Sense of it is very plain, and that is this; That it is a foolish Thing to make Flesh our Arm, and to put our Confidence in Men; for how fair soever their outward Behaviour towards us may be, and how kind soever their Promises, yet their Hearts are often deceitful and wicked, and it is impossible for us to know them.

This, as I take it, is the Prophet's Account of the Deceitfulness and Unsearchableness of the Heart, but very different it is from the common Opinion which obtains concerning this Point; which I now come, in the Second Place, to examine:

The common Opinion is; That these Words are not so much to be interpreted of other Mens Hearts with Respect to us, or of our own Hearts with Respect to other Men, as of our own Hearts with Respect to ourselves. And the Doctrine drawn from them is this; That every Man's Heart is so treacherous and so unsearchable, that the Man himself cannot make any Judgment of it, as to its Uprightness and Sincerity before God; tho' he think himself never so sincere, he may be deceived, and be all the while an Hypocrite. And this
Notion

Notion is carried so far, that, among some, it is made a Mark of one's Sincerity, for a Man to doubt of his Sincerity. Which Opinion is apt to do Mischief two several Ways: To some it may give Encouragement to think themselves sincerely good Christians, when they are not; for, certainly, the less sincere any Man is, the more Reason he hath to doubt of his Sincerity; and since all Hearts are deceitful, why may he not be deceived as much in the Judgment he makes of the bad State of his Soul, as he may be, if he should entertain a favourable Opinion of his own Condition? On the other Side, to many that are indeed sincerely good Christians, this Notion doth occasion many unreasonable Fears and Perplexities, and Disquiet of Mind: For tho' their Hearts do not condemn them for any Thing, yet there is no Comfort to be drawn from hence; for their Hearts are deceitful, and may abuse them; may speak Peace to them, when there is no Peace.

But now this Doctrine, as it hath no Countenance from this Text, (as I think I have sufficiently shewn) so is it likewise contrary both to our own inward Sense, and to the Holy Scripture. First, It is against the common Sense and Experience of Mankind. A Man's Heart, as I told you, is nothing else but the Principle from which his Actions (as considered morally) do flow; it is a Man's Thoughts and Designs, his Inclinations and Affections. Now, what Thing in the World
is

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is there that a Man can know, if he know not these? Every Man is as sensible of the inward Motions and Dispositions of his Soul, and knows as well what his Thoughts are, what Principles he is acted by, as he knows when he is Hungry or Thirsty, when he feels Pleasure or Pain, when he hears or sees this or the other Object. When we transact any Business, or drive on any Bargain with Men, we know whether we deal honestly and truly with them, or no: If we have Designs of over-reaching them, or imposing upon them, they perhaps cannot discover it; but it is impossible we should conceal our Designs from ourselves.

And as the Matter stands with our own Hearts as to Men, so doth it also stand with them as to God Almighty. We all know well enough, (or at least may know, if we will but look into ourselves) how our Hearts stand affected to Virtue and Goodness. We know what the Designs are we drive on in our Profession of Religion. We know what Acts of Piety we perform out of an inward Devotion, and what for the serving worldly Ends. We know what Sins we indulge against Conscience, and what Sins we do not. We know when our Prayers are hearty, and when they are only formal and customary. We know when we break our Resolutions, and when we keep them; when the main Study and Design of our Lives is to please God; when to please ourselves, or to gratify
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our Lusts. In a Word; In all the Instances of our Conversation, we know whether we deal sincerely with God, or no: In these Things our Consciences are as a thousand Witnesses; and if we look into them, they will never deceive us; and if they did deceive us, there would be no such Virtue as Sincerity, nor any such Sin as Hypocrisy, in the World.

But, Secondly; As this received Opinion, That a Man cannot know his own Heart, is against our inward Sense and Experience, so is it also repugnant to the Holy Scripture. There is nothing more usual there, than to find the most holy Men pleading and insisting upon their own Uprightness and Sincerity; and this not only before Men, but before God himself. Now, how could they be imagined to do this, unless they thought, at least, that they knew their own Hearts? *David* doth this twenty Times over in his *Psalms*. *Hezekiah*, in his Sickness, is not afraid to speak to God in these Words; *I beseech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in Truth, and with a perfect Heart, and have done that which is good in thy Sight,* 2 Kings xx. 3. *Job* stood so steadfastly on his own Integrity, that whatever his Friends said to the contrary, he solemnly declares he would insist on it 'till he died. *St. Paul* himself fetches a Comfort and Joy from this very Topick; *This is my Rejoicing, saith he, the Testimony of my Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, I have had my Conversation*

sation in this World. The same St. Paul tells us, *That no Man knows the Things of a Man, but the Spirit of a Man that is in him.* So that, according to him, the Spirit of a Man doth know his own Affairs and Concerns.

Lastly; Nothing in the World can be plainer to our Purpose than those Words of St. *John*, 1 Epist. iii. 20, 21. *If our Heart (saith he) condemn us, God is greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all Things: But if our Hearts condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God.* So that, if that Apostle may be believed, it is our Hearts condemning us, or not condemning us, upon which we are to ground our Confidence, or no Confidence towards God. The unavoidable Consequence of which is, that we may know our own Hearts, and be competent Judges, whether we be sincere towards God, or no.

Well, but if this be so, how comes it to pass that so many are every Day deceived in the Judgment they make of themselves; some taking themselves to be good Christians, and to have a Right and Title to God's Favour, who are indeed far from it; others, who have no Reason to doubt of their Sincerity in God's Service, yet are not able to entertain a good Thought of themselves?

I cannot deny the Matter of Fact to be so as is here represented: But I answer, That the Mistakes that both Sorts of People lie under, do not proceed from hence, that they do not, or may not know their own Hearts,
but

but from quite different Causes, of which I now come to give an Account; and that is the Third Thing I propos'd upon this Text.

Now the true Causes from whence, as I conceive, these kind of Mistakes concerning a Man's self (which are commonly attributed to the Deceitfulness of the Heart) do proceed, are chiefly these three; that is to say, Either not sufficiently examining our own Hearts: Or, Secondly, A Misapprehension concerning the Terms that God hath required of us, in order to Salvation: Or, Thirdly, Some accidental Indisposition of Temper, which renders us incapable of rightly judging concerning ourselves.

First of all; Perhaps a Man doth not examine his own Heart at all, or examines it very carelessly. Now, when it happens thus with a Man, how can it be avoided but he must needs fall under great Mistakes concerning the State of his Soul? The Case is here the same with that of a Tradesman, that will make a Judgment of his temporal Estate, without examining his Books, without inspecting into Particulars, where he is Debtor, and where he is Creditor. Is it not a Hundred to One that such a Man makes a false Estimate of what he is worth, and thinks himself either richer or poorer than really he is? But yet it doth not follow from hence that his Books do deceive him; on the contrary, if he had searched them, they would have told him truly in what Condition he stood

stood towards all he dealt with. And thus it is with Mens Hearts; they are our Books, and so are they styled in Scripture; and we ought to open them, and study them daily, and from them to judge of the Account between Heaven and us. But if we be negligent in this Matter, if we will not be at the Trouble of searching into our Hearts and Lives, but run on at Random, and live by Chance, and still resolve to hope the best, let us not blame our Hearts, but our Idleness, if we take up false Opinions of ourselves. These Books will be opened and examined at the Great Day; and then we shall be convinced, that we might have made a true Judgment of our Condition, if we would have taken Pains to look into them.

But, Secondly; Men often take up false Notions and Apprehensions of the Measures of Virtue and Obedience that God requires of them, and make Terms of Salvation to themselves which God never made. This is another Cause and Occasion (and indeed the most common one of all) of our Mistakes in the Judgment we make of our own Condition, and which we too frequently, but very unskilfully, attribute to the Deceitfulness of our Hearts. Some Men think that a less Degree of Strictness and Holiness will recommend them to God, than indeed will; and of these likewise there are different Sorts, according to the different Schemes of Religion Men have framed in their own Minds. Some think, if they

they be but free from gross and scandalous Immorality in their Conversation, they are safe enough, tho' they live all their Lives without an inward Sense of God, or Religion. Others think, that a disclaiming their own Righteousness, and intirely relying and depending upon the Righteousness of Christ, will, without more ado, secure their Title to Salvation. Others think, that a regular Attendance on the outward Worship of God, and now and then performing Acts of Repentance at the solemn Seasons, when they receive the Sacrament, will give them a Title to all the Promises of the Gospel, tho' yet they never mortify those Lusts, and vicious Habits, which they so often repent of. A great many other Forms of Religion there are, with which Men may cheat themselves into a good Opinion of their own eternal Condition.

But then this ariseth not from the Deceitfulness of their Hearts, but from the Error of their Understandings, which they have not taken Care should be rightly informed concerning the Terms upon which God hath offered Salvation to Mankind in the Gospel.

The Testimony of their own Hearts concerning themselves, is true enough; they are really as sincere as they take themselves to be, and have made all those Attainments that they think they have: But then that Degree of Sincerity, those Attainments, will not do
their

their Work; and here lies their Mistake. And as it is frequently thus with Men that are apt to judge too favourably of themselves, so it is also with those that think worse of themselves than they ought to do. A great many good Men are full of Fears, and Doubts, and Perplexities concerning their Condition, and that without any Reason in the World. But whence doth this happen? Is it because their Hearts give them a wrong Account of themselves? No; but because they have set the Terms of Salvation, in their own Minds, higher than Christ hath set them in the Scriptures. They have taken up an Opinion, perhaps, that there is no pretending to be a Disciple of Christ, unless a Man live such a perfect Life of Virtue and Holiness, that he hath even rescued himself from the common and daily Frailties which are incident to human Nature. It is not enough with them to strive against all Sin, and not to be guilty of any wilful one, unless they can also live so, as that their Consciences do not reproach them for any Failure in their Duty, or any actual Transgression of the Laws of God. They censure themselves as much for an Omission of their Prayers, or for too free a Meal, or for an hasty Passion, or an indiscreet Word, or a Carelessness and Wandring in their Devotions, and the like, as other People do for downright Crimes and Impieties.

Unless now these People could live free from all these Defects and Irregularities (which

(which they will find it a hard Matter to do, so long as they converse in the World, and are cloathed with mortal Bodies) how is it possible, so long as they are under these Misapprehensions, but they must think very hardly and disconsolately of their Condition? But then I hope nobody will say, that it is the Deceitfulness of their Heart, that is the Cause of this wrong Judgment they make of themselves; but their Misapprehensions concerning the Measures of Christ's Obedience. If their Understanding were right in the Matter, their Hearts would no way deceive them, but would speak Peace to them.

But, Thirdly; Another Cause to which are owing the Mistakes of Men concerning their Condition, (tho' the Deceitfulness of a Man's Heart suffers the Blame of them) is often some accidental Indisposition of Temper, that renders them incapable of making a right Judgment of themselves. This is visible in those that are afflicted with that which we call religious Melancholy; which tho' it be a Disease of the Body, yet so doth it affect the Mind, that a Man can no more, under that Distemper, form a right Notion of his own spiritual State, than a Man that is over-run with the Yellow-Jaundice, or looks through a coloured Glass, can rightly judge of the Colour of an Object presented to him; such an one will pass a Judgment, not according to the Truth of the Thing, or the Appearance it hath to others, but according to the Im-

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pressions of those Colours, with which his Eye is prepossessed. But now, tho' it thus happens to Mens Senses, thro' a Disease, or some other Accident, yet I hope nobody will from hence draw this general Conclusion, that the Senses of a Man are so deceitful, that he cannot rely upon the Report they give in to him concerning outward Objects. And as little Reason is there to make the same Conclusion concerning a Man's Heart, upon Account that now and then the Understanding is so deeply tinged with Melancholy, that he judgeth falsely of his own State.

The Truth is this; In the Condition of several Hypochondriack Persons, who, tho' they are truly devout towards God, and make it the Business of their Lives to recommend themselves to him, and would not for the World do any thing that should wound their Consciences; yet, such is their Infelicity, they are never satisfied with themselves; they accuse themselves for every Thing they think, or say, or do; nay, they are sometimes ready to despair, upon Account of the Greatness of their Sins, many of which yet lie only in their Imagination; But, God be thanked, these Persons are not the worse for thinking themselves so very bad; and though they cannot make a right Judgment of themselves, God will: But, in the mean time, these Disturbances of theirs do not at all reflect upon the Sincerity of their own Hearts, any more than, as I said, a Man's having a Disease, calls

calls into Question the Credit of the outward Senses, as to Matter of Taste, or Smell, or Seeing, or the like.

And thus much on my Third general Point. But it will be said, Is not the Heart then in any Sense deceitful with respect to ourselves? I answer, Yes, it is: And in what Sense it is so, is the Fourth Thing I proposed to give an Account of. And, in my Judgment, the Deceitfulness of our Hearts lies in this, That tho' they do not deceive us as to what they represent concerning the present Posture and State of our Souls, yet they often deceive us in what they represent to us concerning our future Behaviour, or the Frame and Disposition we shall be in, some time hence. If we ask them in what Condition we are now at present, they will give us a faithful Answer: But if we ask them how long we shall continue in that Condition, or whether we shall be in the same Temper or Disposition a Year hence; in that they do often impose upon us: So that, in this respect, we may truly apply to them the Words of my Text, (though the Prophet meant them in another Sense) *The Heart is deceitful above all Things; who can know it?* And, in Truth, this is all the Deceitfulness our Hearts are capable of, with respect to ourselves. We often are of one Mind to Day, and of another to Morrow. We eagerly at the present entertain this or the other Design that is proposed to us, and perhaps, for a while, we briskly pursue it; but

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we are often, in as little Time, weary of it, and, by degrees, quite let it fall to the Ground.

I grant, this Uncertainty in ourselves, is sometimes very commendable; for if we happen to chuse amiss at the first, it is but fit and just, as soon as we find our Mistake, that we alter our Counsels and Designs. But it is not only thus with us in the Case of a rash inconvenient Resolution, but in those Cases where we chuse most wisely, and resolve most deliberately, and pursue those Resolutions for a Time with the greatest Vigour and Earnestness imaginable; even then, tho' we can never find any Cause to blame ourselves for pitching on those Designs, yet do we quite let them drop, and take contrary Measures. Have we not frequent Experience of Men, who, upon the awakening of their Consciences by some Affliction, or good Advice from their Friends, or some grievous Inconveniency they have brought upon themselves, do enter into solemn and strict Resolutions to forsake that sinful Course of Life they are engaged in; to leave off their Drunkenness, for Instance, or their Whoredom, or the like, and to become strictly sober, and virtuous; nay, and do so firmly continue in those Resolutions for some Time, that they verily believe they shall never be guilty of those Sins again; yet, upon the Return of Temptations, do, by degrees, lose all their good Impressions, and become as lewd and as dissolute as ever they were before? So that
you

you see there is no trusting of those Men, nor could they trust themselves. And as Men are often thus deceived in their Purposes of growing better, so are they as often in their Purposes of not growing worse. Some there are, who, tho' they make no great Profession of Religion, or of strict Virtue, yet have such a Sense of Morality, or Generosity, (call it what you will) that they would abhor the Thoughts of doing any base, infamous Action; tho' they cannot pretend to be good, yet they will undertake you shall never find them bad Men; you shall never take them in any Practice that is unhandsome, or base, or apparently wicked; and certainly they are to be believed in what they say or think, so far as a Man can promise for the future. But in this Instance also the Heart is deceitful, as well as in the former; they can no more tell, by their present Inclinations, what Degree of Impiety they may at last arrive at, if they continue indulging any Sin, than others can tell, from their present good Purposes, what Progress they shall make in Virtue: If a Man once begins to be wicked, there is no Step of Wickedness he can stop at.

The Case of *Hazael*, in the 8th Chapter of the 2d of *Kings*, is very proper to this Purpose; that History is usually brought for an Instance of the Deceitfulness of the Heart; and it is a remarkable one in that Sense of its Deceitfulness we speak of, but in no other. *Hazael* was a Servant of the King of Syria,

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and was sent by his Master, when he was sick, to the Prophet *Elisha*, to know of him whether he should recover. The Prophet, after he had given him an Answer to his Message, applies himself to the Messenger, and, weeping, told him what horrible Mischief he should do, what Ravages and Desolations he should make among the *Israelites* in time to come. The Man was very much amazed at the Prophet's Speeches, and seriously answered, *Am I a Dog, that I should do this Thing?* Without Doubt he spoke what he thought; it never enter'd into his Mind to have a Hand in such Barbarities as the Prophet spoke of, and therefore he might sincerely declare his Abhorrence of such kind of Practices. But yet, for all that, the Prophet (as the Event shewed) knew him better than he knew himself; for when he came to be King of *Syria*, he did really do all those Things, and was guilty of all those inhuman Cruelties that the Prophet had spoken of. This is a remarkable Instance of a Man that thought himself honest, but proved notoriously wicked. And thus, I doubt not, it generally happens with all Men that prove so; there are some Times of their Lives when they would tremble to think of several wicked Actions, which afterwards they themselves do commit, not only without Remorse, but with Pleasure.

But it will be said, Is not, in the mean time, the Condition of Mankind very miserable,

able, that can neither rely upon their Resolutions to do well, nor upon their Purposes not to do ill? I answer, It is no other Condition than what is necessary for them, in order to the making them careful of their own Actions: And if God hath endued us with Liberty of Choice, and given us a Command over our own Actions, and put us into a Capacity of doing well, or doing ill, it must needs be thus with us. But yet there is this to be said, to mitigate our own Infelicity as to this Point; and that is, Tho' the Heart of Man be deceitful as to what is future, yet it is not equally so to all kind of Persons. There are some Men may much better trust their own Hearts, than others can; nay, and if they do trust them, they will rarely deceive them: It is a Thousand to One but their Hearts will give them a true Account of themselves, even with relation to what is future: But then, as for others, that are in different Circumstances, there is no such Thing to be said.

To give an Account of this Difference in Men, as to the Deceitfulness of their Hearts, (I speak with reference to their spiritual Estates, as they stand to God and Virtue, which is the only Thing I have here to consider) it will be needful to distinguish Mankind into three Sorts.

There are some Men that have got Habits of Virtue and Goodness, have made it their Business for a long time to serve God, and

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live in Obedience to his Laws. There are others likewise, that have got Habits of Vice and Sin, have a long time pursued a Course of Wickedness, have indulged all their sensual Lusts and Appetites without any Restraint, save only what their worldly Interests have put upon them. There is likewise a third sort of Men, that are neither so much under the Power of Goodness, or the Power of Vice, but that they do, as it were, hesitate and deliberate to which of the two they should give up themselves: They seem to be in the Confines of both, and sometimes to incline to the one, sometimes to the other, but have not fixed themselves firm Subjects to either.

Now, tho' the Heart, as to what is future, may be deceitful, in some Degree or other, in all these sorts of Men, yet it is abundantly more deceitful in the last, than in the two former. The first Sort, those that have got Habits of Virtue, there is no great Danger of their miscarrying; and still the less Danger, by how much more those Habits are rooted and confirmed: They having, in a good degree, mortified all their corrupt Inclinations, and used themselves to a Life of Piety and Virtue, will find that Life so natural, so extremely agreeable to them, and the Grace of Christ so powerful in them, that they shall not be able, without great Violence to their own Minds, to forsake God, and commit Wickedness; it will be like putting a
Knife

Knife to their Throats, or throwing themselves into the Fire.

As for the second sort of Men, those that are harden'd in Sin, God knows their State is likewise too much fixed, either for themselves, or others, easily to be deceived about it, unless perhaps in this respect, that they may arrive to a greater Pitch of Wickedness and Degeneracy than ever they intended. If any Judgment can be made of them, as to what is future, it is this; That if God do not in Mercy awaken them, and rouse them up by some especial, extraordinary Providence, they will grow worse and worse, and can never fix any Bounds to their Wickedness; for as the Degrees of Virtue are infinite, so are those of Vice too. So that, by this, you see they are the third sort of Men in which that Deceitfulness of the Heart we are speaking of, doth generally take Place. Those that are not perfectly fixed, either as to Virtue, or to Vice; those whose Conscience is so awake, that tho' it cannot always oblige them to do as they should do, yet it doth severely testify against them, if they commit any great Sin. These Men now are very uncertain; sometimes they are altogether in a good Humour, they are very sorry for their Follies, they are infinitely convinced that they shall be undone, to all Intents and Purposes, if they do not change their Course of Life; and accordingly they do sometimes resolve seriously to do it, and now and then
make

make some Attempts towards it. At other times they are quite off the Hinges, yielding themselves up to the Sway of their Lusts and Passions, and closing with every Temptation that comes in their Way. Now, wherever Men are in these Circumstances, their Hearts are infinitely deceitful; and it is impossible for them certainly to know in what State and Temper of Mind, as to God and Religion, they shall be, in a Month hence; and yet this is, I believe, the Condition of the greatest Part of Men. But yet, even of these Men, there is some Difference; according as they more or less approach to Habits, either in Virtue or Vice, there is more or less Trust to be given to what their Hearts tell them, as to their future Behaviour.

This is, as near as I can guess, a true Account of the Deceitfulness of Mens Hearts, with reference to themselves. All that now remains, is, in the Fifth and Last Place, To say something about the Remedy of it.

Now, since it appears, from what has been said, That our Hearts Deceitfulness is caused by our fluctuating, as it were, between Virtue and Vice; and that the nearer any one approaches to Habits of Goodness, the less deceitful will his Heart be; it is plain, That the Cure of this Deceitfulness must consist in the getting and increasing such Habits; and therefore, whatever conduceth to that End, is a proper Prescription in this Case. Now, for the obtaining Habits of Virtue, every one will

will see that these four Things are absolutely necessary.

I shall but just name them, and conclude.

First of all ; Serious and hearty Resolutions to break loose from our Sins, and to live a holy, virtuous, and religious Life, whatever Pains or Trouble it may put us to ; and those often repeated : not contenting ourselves with resolving now and then at a good Time, but every Day renewing our Purposes, and devoting ourselves to God, and his Service, and fortifying our Minds against all those Difficulties and Allurements that may be thrown in our Way, to divert us from the Good we have engaged ourselves in.

Secondly ; A constant Care and Watchfulness over Ourselves, and over all our Actions ; and especially at those Times when we are in the View of Temptations, then it will particularly concern us to stand upon our Guard, and narrowly to attend the Motions of our own Minds.

Thirdly ; Frequent Trials and exercising of ourselves in the Way of Virtue. Every one knows, that an Habit of any Action is got by doing that Action often : If we would get an Habit of Devotion, we must use ourselves to say our Prayers : If we would get an Habit of Meekness, we must take all Occasions of practising upon ourselves, to suppress the Anger and Resentments that arise in us upon any Provocation. And thus as to all the other Instances of Virtue.

And

And let us remember this; That tho' every Action of this kind may at the first be very troublesome to us, and withal very imperfect; yet every time we repeat the Action, we shall do it both with greater Ease, and with greater Perfection and Satisfaction to ourselves; and if we continue on in this Repetition of our Actions, we shall, in time, get the Habit we desire.

Especially, in the last Place; If, with all these Things, we join constant and fervent Prayer to God, and a hearty Faith in Christ, together with the Use of those other Means that our Religion doth recommend to us. Knowing the Deceitfulness of our own Hearts, the Weakness and Inconstancy of our Tempers, we must fetch in other Aids and Succours, besides those that we have in ourselves, even the Aids and Succours of the Holy Spirit of God, which he never refuses to any Soul that earnestly prays for them, and endeavours to frame his Life according to those Institutions that Jesus Christ hath laid down in the Gospel.

These are the Methods, which if we constantly practise, we shall undoubtedly grow in Virtue and Goodness; and our Hearts will, by degrees, be so confirmed in pious Habits, that we shall not need to fear they will ever deceive us: but we shall go from Strength to Strength, 'till at last we come to appear before God in *Sion*, the Heavenly

venly *Jerusalem*, not made with Hands,
where we shall for ever live in unspeakable
Glory and Happiness.

*To which Place God Almighty bring us
all, &c.*



SERMON



SERMON XV.

I Epist. St. JOHN, V. 3.

This is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments; and his Commandments are not grievous.

IT is the latter Part of this Text I shall now beg Leave to insist on,—*His Commandments are not grievous.*

And I would to God we all thought so; for then more of us would set ourselves to keep God's Commandments than now do!

Some have got such frightful Notions of Religion, that indeed they have not the Courage in good earnest to engage in it: They look upon it as made for none but either the Melancholy, or the Miserable; such as are not framed in their Tempers for the Enjoyment of Life; or such as, by reason of their unhappy Circumstances, are incapacitated for them. With some it passeth, that the Precepts of Religion (as they are taught us in the holy Scriptures) are impossible to be liv'd up to, and therefore it is in vain to trouble

ble their Heads about them. Others, that have consider'd the Matter better, tho' they cannot say they are impossible, yet they are tempted to think they are very hard and severe; they are extreme rigorous Impositions, and indeed unreasonable Restraints upon human Nature, and will put one to so much Trouble and Pains, and Self-denial, that, in truth, if a Man will scrupulously govern himself by them, he must not at all live like a Man in this World, nor enjoy himself in the common Gratifications, that, by the Frame and Constitution of Things, seem to have been allowed to Mankind.

Now upon such Prejudices as these, that Men have taken up, a great many, I fear, are mightily discouraged from ever seriously applying themselves to God and Goodness; and, for these Reasons, think themselves very excusable either for their making no Profession of Religion at all, or, if they do make such a Profession, for their indulging themselves in such Liberties as are altogether inconsistent with it.

I do not know how I can do greater Service, in order to the recommending the serious Practice of Religion to you, which is my Business at this time, than by endeavouring to vindicate it from these Exceptions; by putting the Proposition, here affirmed by the Apostle, into as fair a Light as I can; and shewing, that those who frame to themselves such dismal Apprehensions of a strictly pious and

and virtuous Life, do proceed upon very false Grounds; and that the Duty which God requires of us, is so far from being an intolerable or a grievous Burden upon Mankind, that, on the contrary, it is very light and easy.

This, I am sure, we have sufficient Warrant, both from our Saviour, and his Apostles, to teach and declare to all the World; whatever Prejudices Men may have entertained to the contrary. Our Saviour in express Terms hath told us, That *his Yoke is easy, and his Burden is light*: And his beloved Apostle St. *John* hath in this Text declared, That *his Commandments are not grievous*.

I am here far from denying, that there are Difficulties in Religion: It would be against the Sense and Experience of Mankind to affirm there are none; nay, as Things generally stand with Mens corrupt Nature and Principles, it cannot be denied that it is more difficult, and will require more Care and Labour to be virtuous, than to be vicious. All the World must acknowledge, that going in the Paths of Virtue, is like going up the Hill, it will put one to Pains and Intention of Nerves: Whereas, on the other side, to live loosely and viciously, is such a Descent, as the Degeneracy of Mankind, and the evil Examples we have before us, have made very natural and easy to every Body. But this, notwithstanding, we may safely affirm, that as the Way
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of God and Virtue is in itself a much plainer and easier Way than that of Vice and Wickedness; so, all those Things consider'd, that are to be put into the Balance against our natural Infirmities, and Indispositions to Virtue, it will be found, that a Man shall need to take less Pains to be very good, than to be very bad; that a Man shall more consult his own Ease, and Pleasure, and Satisfaction, by living a religious, than an irreligious Life. Nay, let the extremest Hardships and Difficulties that ever happen to any Man that gives up himself a Votary to Religion, be taken into the Consideration; yet, for all that, it ought not to be accounted a severe or grievous Imposition, but an Obligation upon us that is very natural, very easy, nay, and very delightful; *His Commandments are not grievous.*

This is the Point I am to maintain; and for the making it good, I shall proceed by several Steps and Degrees, and lay down my Propositions; so that every one may serve both to confirm the Truth of what we are now starting, and also either obviate or answer the Objections that are brought to the contrary.

And the First Point I assert, is this; That Religion is not an impracticable Thing, as some Men do suggest, but it is possible for us to live up to it. There is no Man living can affirm, that there is any Thing commanded by the Laws of Jesus Christ, (which to us Christians, makes the whole of our Duty, and the

Whole of our Religion) but what every Man in the World may, if he will set himself upon it, yield Obedience to it. Take the hardest Part of the Christian Yoke, that is to say, Forgiveness of Enemies, doing Good to our Enemies, denying our worldly Interests, and renouncing all we have (when God calls us to it) for the sake of Jesus Christ; yet I hope there is nobody can say that these Things are impossible, tho' they may be accounted very severe. Impossible they cannot be, because a thousand Men have actually done all these Things, and that upon far lighter Motives and Considerations than Christ's Religion offers and proposeth to us for the doing of them.

And if these Things be practicable, why must we not think the same of the rest of the Christian Precepts, such as owning God for our Creator, and continual Benefactor; and as such, paying him our constant Tribute of Worship, and Prayer, and Praise, both in publick and private; living in an humble Sense of his Almighty Majesty, and our own Unworthiness; using with Temperance and Moderation the good Things he vouchsafes us; being honest, and just, and faithful in all our Dealings; and shewing Kindness, and good Nature, and Charity to all our fellow Creatures; in a Word, living righteously, and soberly, and godly in this present World? Do these Things look so very formidable, that a Man should shrink at the naming them? and
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cry out, Oh, these Things are too hard for Mankind! It is impossible we should live up to them! Why, I would fain know what Rules for the Government of our Actions are practicable, if these be not? And yet these are the great Hardships and Impossibilities that, in the ordinary Course of Providence, will occur to us in the way of Religion: These are the Things in which our Duty will principally lie, and in which we shall be exercising ourselves all our Lives: And I dare say, not one of a thousand did ever meet with greater Difficulties in the Way of Religion, than the Practice of these Things.

Ay, but it will be said, I have not fairly represented the Matter; the Impossibility of keeping God's Commandments doth not lie in any particular Instance of Duty; for it cannot be denied, every Precept of the Gospel, singly taken, may be practicable enough; but the Objection is, that our Duty is impracticable in the whole; that is to say, the Particulars are so many, and the Laws themselves so strict, extending both to our Thoughts and Words, as well as to our Actions, that no Man can attend to them at all times: So that it is impossible for any Man so to order his Conversation, but that, in some Instance or other, he will be a Transgressor of God's Laws, and that too perhaps every Day; and consequently, the Duty required of us is too hard for us.

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Why, if this be the Objection, there is an easy Answer to it. It was never intended, when we are giving an Account of the Possibility of keeping God's Commandments, to leave out of the Account the gracious Allowances that God hath promised by Christ Jesus, to make for the Infirmities of human Nature. Nay, indeed, whenever we lay down this general Proposition, That every Man is indispensably bound to keep all God's Commandments; that Proposition is always to be understood in such a Sense as to take in those gracious Allowances. If therefore we do but remember two Things as to this Matter, this whole Objection perfectly vanisheth.

The First is, That God Almighty, in the Laws he gave us by Jesus Christ, did never mean to tie us up to an exact and unfinning Obedience to them: but, in the Gospel Sense, we are said to obey God's Laws, when we do our sincere Endeavours to obey them; when in the main of our Lives, we live up to them; when we do not indulge ourselves in any known wilful Course of Sin; but, as much as we can, as far as our own Weakness of Nature, and the Circumstances of our Lives, will permit, we do mortify our corrupt Affections, and live holy and virtuous Lives.

But, Secondly; Tho' we have not done this for the Life past, yet there is still a Plank left after Shipwreck. If we do but truly repent of our Sins past, how great, how heinous, and how long continued in soever they have

have been, (that is, so repent, as to forsake them); even in this Case, we say, that such a Man keeps the Commandments of God, and doth all that God requires of him; for he doth as much as God, under the Gospel Covenant, hath promised he will accept, and reward a Man for in the other World.

Now, this being the Case, you see plainly, that all this Talk of the Impossibility of keeping God's Commandments, and the urging of it as an Exception against Religion; as it is very impertinent, so indeed it is not fair dealing; for the Laws of God require no more of a Man than he can do; and whoever doth his honest Endeavours to serve God as well as he can, such a Man (we will, without Scruple, say) doth keep God's Commandments, notwithstanding any Frailties and Infirmities that may otherwise attend the Course of his Life.

Having thus cleared my Way, I proceed a Step farther, and lay down a second Proposition as to this Matter; and that is this:

That as the Commandments of God are not grievous, upon account that they are impossible; so neither are they grievous in this respect, That they are unnatural, or a Force upon the Constitution of Mankind, (as those whom we are now disputing with object). Restraints indeed we do allow they are to the licentious Practices of Mankind, but not such Restraints as ought to be called Invasions or Intrenchments upon human Liberty; be-
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cause, indeed, they are but the setting forth, or the marking out, of the true Bounds of that Liberty, as it is a Perfection of human Nature: Which Bounds whosoever transgresseth, he will be so far from being the easier, or the happier, for so doing, that he will be certainly miserable.

As long as human Nature is as it is, the Happiness of Mankind can consist in nothing else but in using their Liberty, according to the best Rules of Reason; and those we are sure, are but another Name for the Laws of Religion: And the very transgressing those Rules, tho' God had annexed no Penalties to the Transgression, would of itself have found a sufficient Punishment. Every Man that lives in a Course of Vice and Irreligion, is sensible of this; he knows and feels that Things are not with him as they should be; he knows and feels that his Mind is not at Ease, is not right in that Way that he is engaged in; because he every Day doth Things which his Reason cannot approve of. Now, whether this be not a sufficient Demonstration, that the Ways of Virtue are suitable to our Natures, and the Way of Vice and Sin contradictory to them, I leave any one to judge. In truth, a Man may as well put the Question, which of the two is most natural and agreeable to a Man's Constitution, Health or Sicknes; as he can put it, whether Virtue or Vice be so.

Ay,

Ay, but it will be said; Is it not plain, that Men are born with several strong Inclinations and Propensities to Pleasure, to Wealth, to Power, and Greatness? and the like. And doth not Religion put a terrible Curb upon all those Appetites and Passions? How then can you call the Laws of it agreeable to Nature?

Why, to this I answer; That as to all the Appetites and Passions that Men are born with, of what kind soever they be, Religion, as it is taught us in the Gospel, doth not hinder the Satisfaction of any of them. I do not know of any Inclination that is truly natural, but what is allowed to be gratified, so long as it is done in proper Instances, and due Measure, so far as it is fit, and just, and reasonable; nay, so far as it really conduceth to the true Pleasure and Happiness of the Person that is concerned. All that our Religion forbids, is the Irregularity and Exorbitancy of our Passions and Appetites; and that we should not so humour them, as either to hurt ourselves, or to do Injury to our Neighbour, by the Gratification of them.

These are all the Restraints I know of, that the Commandments of God put upon Men as to these Matters; and if so, judge you how terrible they are. But to put this Matter out of Doubt: If any Man can make it a Question, whether Virtue or Vice be the more agreeable to the Frame of his Nature; I would but desire him, for the resolving this

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Question, to run over all the Instances of our Duty, as charged upon us in the Scripture, and all the Sins opposite thereto, and in his own Mind compare them one with another; and then let him honestly pronounce Sentence in Favour of either, according as he finds which of the two will yield most Peace, and Ease, and Quiet to his own Mind, and will put him to the least Labour, and Trouble, and Disturbance.

And I think these are certain Marks by which a Man may judge whether a Thing be natural or agreeable to him, or no.

Now, I say, If a Man will proceed by these Measures, and run the Parallel between all the Virtues, and their contrary Vices; as for Instance,

Between Meekness and Patience on the one hand, and Fretfulness, and Peevishness, and Discontent on the other:

Between Love, and Charity, and doing Good, on the one hand; and Hatred, and Malice, and Desire of Revenge, on the other:

• Between chaste and lawful Love, and unlawful and adulterous Lusts:

Between Temperance and Sobriety in the Use of God's Blessings; and perpetual Gluttony, and Drunkenness, and Revellings:

Between Faith in God, and Trust in his Providence and Contentedness with a Competency; and a boundless, unsatiable, avaricious Desire of Riches:

And

And thus to all other particular Virtues recommended to us by Religion, and the particular Vices contradictory thereto; I say, if a Man will take this Method in examining the Things, and in judging as he finds, I dare be bold to say, there is no One living, but, upon such Examination, will readily pronounce, that in all the Instances wherein our Morals are concerned, those that we call the Virtues, are much more easy, much more natural, much more delightful, and will put us to abundantly less Trouble and Disquietude, than the contrary Vices.

Well, then! we are come thus far; The Commandments of God are neither impossible to be kept, nor are they hard or severe in themselves; so that they are not grievous upon either of those Accounts.

But then it may be said, for all this, they may be grievous in another respect; because, as the corrupt State of Mankind is, we have neither Will nor Power to set ourselves heartily to the keeping of them: Our own Depravity, and the Devil's Temptations, are too hard for us; and then what doth the Reasonableness of them, in their own Nature, avail to us, (be it never so great) they being still beyond our Strength?

For the removing of this Objection, I lay down my Third Proposition, which is this: Let our natural Inabilities, and our Aversions to that which is Good, be as great as they will; yet the supernatural Assistance we may expect

expect from God, for the carrying on of this Work, will be sufficient, at least, to make the Scales even. So that, notwithstanding those Disadvantages, it will be as much in our Power; and we shall be as much inclined to be good, as to be bad; to live in Obedience to God's Commands, as to live in Contradiction to them.

When we talk of the Possibility of obeying all the Precepts of the Gospel, and the very great Reasonableness of them in themselves, and their Agreeableness to our Natures; yet we do not think these two Points alone sufficient to counterbalance the very great Propensity we have, in this corrupt degenerate State, to pursue the Ways of Vice and Sensuality. Alas! we must needs acknowledge, that we are not only very weak and impotent, but there seems to be a strong Bias clapt upon our Natures, which renders us averse to spiritual Things, and too prone, God knows, to run into Actions that we should not; and all this, besides the Temptations we meet with from without. But then, on the other side, if we consider that God is never wanting to any Man, and that He is always ready, to supply, by his immediate Grace, what is defective in our Natures: When we consider that one of the great Benefits which Christ hath purchased for us, is the Gift of the Holy Ghost, by the Help of which every Man may work out his own Salvation, may do all that God requires of him, in order to
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his future Happiness; and not only do it, but do it easily: When we consider that there is no Man, that is baptized into Christ's Religion, who means honestly, but hath God's Promise to be continually assisted from above with his Divine Power and Grace, whereby he may be enabled to do those Things which by Nature he could not do: Nay, that this Power of Christ, this Virtue of the Holy Ghost in our Hearts, is there lodged as a Principle to tempt and invite us to be good, and to bring off our Minds from every Thing that is evil: That the Holy Spirit is within us as a Solicitor of God's Cause against the Suggestions of the Devil, and our own corrupt Hearts; and that he is certainly as powerful and as ready to do us Good, as our Adversary can be to do us Harm:

I say, If these Things be considered, sure we shall be persuaded that the Work of Religion is not so difficult, so hopeless an Undertaking, as we are apt oftentimes to imagine it: *They that are with us, are more than they that are against us.* Tho' the Devil, and our own corrupt Natures, may tempt us strongly one way; yet the Spirit of Christ, and his invisible Attendants, that pitch their Tents round about us, do incline us as much the other way. Nor can there be any Snares laid for us by the wicked One, but what, by the Assistance of this invisible spiritual Army that fights for us, we shall easily break, and overcome. That Divine Spirit that dwells with
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all. Christians, and even where he doth not dwell, (because he is not entertained) yet desires there to dwell, and fails not to be often present, and to prompt unsteady Souls to that which is good, to solicit them continually with his holy Motions, that they would seriously engage in the Ways of Christ; I say, surely this Holy Spirit, by his powerful Influences and Assistances, will so make Amends for the Weakness of our Natures, so smooth the Ruggedness of our Ways, so quell the Force of the Devil's Temptations, that, if a Man do not wilfully betray his own Succours, he will find himself as prevailingly carried on to the Practice of all Virtue and Holiness, as he can be to live a dissolute, careless, and vicious Life. And this is my Third Consideration.

But, Fourthly; This ought also farther to be acknowledged in this Argument, That tho' there be great Difficulties in Religion; tho', as the Temper of Mankind now generally stands, it is much against the Grain to serve God, and live in Obedience to his Commandments; yet these Difficulties are chiefly occasioned by our Prejudices, and evil Habits, by our being used to a contrary Course of Life: But then we are to remember, that, in a little time these Difficulties will wear off, and we shall find, after some Trial, that a Life of sincere Religion and Devotion will be far more natural, and more delightful, than any Course of Sin that we were formerly engaged in.

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The Truth is, If we look upon the Aversions and Indispositions of most Men to Virtue and Goodness, we shall find that they proceed from their former vicious Habits. Men have long been used to a contrary Course, and that makes them that they cannot bear with the Strictness of Religion. Now, upon this Account, I must needs own, that Religion is something troublesome and difficult; and so much the more, by how much the more rooted and inveterate those Habits or Customs are. Here therefore, chiefly, are we to lay the Grounds of whatever Uneasinesses or Hardships we meet with in the Ways of God. When it happens that Vice gets the first Possession of us, (as God knows it doth in the Generality of Men) and that Possession is strengthen'd by many Actions of our own Choice, and by that Means Sin grows customary, and becomes, as it were, a second Nature: Why, in this Case, all the World must acknowledge, that it will be no easy Matter to expel it, and to substitute virtuous Habits in the Place of it; the doing of that, will require Labour, and Pains, and Time, and perhaps also much Struggling, and Self-denial.

But then we are to remember, that this is only for a short Time; it is only upon our first Entrance into a religious Life, our Passage from the one Extreme to the other. For, after we are once passed the Pangs of the New-birth, after we are a little inured to the Ways of Virtue, and have made some tolerable Progress

gress in it, it will become very pleasant, and very easy : For I reason thus ; If Custom and long Usage have such a strange Power, as to make Vice and Sin (which are the most contrary to our Natures of all Things in the World) not only supportable, but also sweet and pleasant to us ; then, sure, much more will the same Custom and Usage make Virtue so ; than which, as we have seen, nothing is more agreeable, more natural, to the Minds of Men. There is no Doubt but, after we have once broken the Strength of our evil Habits, and, by the Exercise of Religion, purged our Souls of their fantastick and diseased Appetites, and recover'd them to their native Taste and Relish ; I say, there is no Doubt but we shall find as much Sweetness and Delight in the Ways of Virtue and Piety, as ever we did in the Ways of Sin. Our Aversions to them will also be gone ; and we shall rather wonder at ourselves, how we came to be so wretchedly imposed upon by the false Appearances of Vice. We shall then acknowledge that we never 'till now enjoyed our true Liberty ; and shall rather chuse to die, than to return to that hard Bondage we before served in to Sin and Satan. In a Word ; All the Difficulties we meet with in the first Steps of our religious Course, will then vanish, and our Way will lie plain and smooth before us, full of Pleasure, and full of Peace, as *Solomon* describes it.

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But to proceed to our Fifth Particular, which ought to be represented upon this Occasion: In the Fifth Place, whereas it is urged against a Life of Religion, that there is much Pains and Watchfulness required to it; we see that this is so far from being a real Difficulty or Inconvenience, that really it is but the natural Effect of our Make and Constitution. We cannot possibly be happy but in Motion; and therefore, to charge this as a Hardship in Religion, that it sets our Wits at work, that it exercises our Diligence, is a very unreasonable Thing. We readily grant, that the Way of Piety, as it is taught us by our Saviour, will call for great Care, and Watchfulness, and Application: Whoever will be a good Christian must not think to be idle, but will find it needful to be very attentive to his Work, and to be much upon his Guard, especially at the Beginning; nay, and after he has made some considerable Attainments in Virtue, he will still find Work enough to employ himself about: And, upon this Account, we cannot deny, but that the Gate that leadeth to Life is a very straight Gate; and they that mean to enter into it, must not only seek, but strive, as our Saviour expresseth it; they must *work out their own Salvation*; they must *give all Diligence to make their Calling and Election sure*, as St. Paul words it.

But then all this, we say, is no real Difficulty in the Matter. All this is nothing but

but a due and natural Exercise of our Powers. It is impossible a Man should live according to his Nature, that is not, for the most part, intent upon something or other: The chief Pleasure of his Life consists in constantly pursuing some Design; and to live sluggishly and without Care, as it is the Way to dull and decay our natural Powers, so it is very uneasy to a Man that useth that Course of Life. There is no Man but will find a great deal more Pleasure in being busy, especially when he hath a good Business in hand, than in sitting still, and having nothing to do: This is so essential to our Natures, that I scruple not to say, that it is one of the main Ingredients of our Happiness, not only in this Life, but in the next. The State of Heaven will chiefly consist in this, in having our natural Powers exalted to the utmost Pitch of Vigour and Activity they are capable of, and being always employed in the Contemplation and the Pursuit of the best and noblest Objects.

That which makes any Man uneasy in Labour, is not his being busy and intent upon a Thing, but his spending himself upon such Things, or in such Ways, as are no ways agreeable to him; as for Instance, when he is either employed in such Exercises as do more than ordinarily exhaust his animal Spirits, and bring great Heaviness and Languor upon him; or, when he lays out his Pains upon that which no ways suits with his Humour,

Humour, and Temper, and Genius: Or, lastly, when he hath such a Business in hand, that he hath no Prospect of bringing it to good Effect, but his Labour seems likely to be lost upon it.

But now, the Diligence and Application, that we must use in this Matter of Virtue and Religion, (let it be otherwise as great as you please) yet hath none of those Inconveniencies attending upon it; since it neither puts us to much bodily Pain, nor brings any great Weariness, or Consumption of Spirits in us, nor is any way against the Constitution or Frame of our Natures, but exceedingly agrees with it: Nor, lastly, is a hopeless and desperate Undertaking, but such a Design, as that every one, who will go about it, may assuredly promise to himself Success in it.

I say, This being the Case of a virtuous Life, no Man ought to think, that the Diligence he useth about it is uneasy or troublesome, but rather the natural Exercise of that Heat, and Briskness, and Vigour that is put into the Temper of every Man. And he that doth not thus spend himself, must either let his Powers lie idle and unemploy'd, and live the Life of a Plant, that is, only receive Nourishment, and grow in Bulk, without any Action; or if he do stir, and busy himself, it must be in such other Ways as are indeed more troublesome and unagreeable to his Nature. It is the great Advantage and Excel-

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lency of a religious Life, that it will always employ us, and find us something to do; so that we shall never grow rusty and dull in our Souls, nor ever complain that Time lies upon our Hands: It will quicken our Diligence and Industry, even as to the Prosecution of our ordinary secular Affairs: It will make us wonderfully solicitous to spend as little a Portion of our Lives unprofitably as possibly may be: But the great Thing of all, is, it will mightily enlarge our Powers, and, with them, our Designs: We shall enter into a new World of Objects, which we little thought of before; and about those Objects, as they are greater or less in Worth or Value, will our Diligence proportionably be employed; and the more shall we wear off that Sluggishness and Rust that a Course of Vice doth naturally contract; and the great Pleasure of our Lives will be, that our Will, our Love, our Desires are unweariedly carried out after that which is good, and are daily more active and vigorous in the Prosecution of it, till at last it will be translated into a State of everlasting, never-ceasing Activity.

A State of Rest, indeed, the Scripture calls it, and it is so in one respect; for there we shall rest from all our Griefs and Sufferings, from every Thing that can create Trouble or Torment to us: But yet, for all that, it is most truly a State of everlasting Motion and Activity;

Activity ; for then our Souls being disengaged from the Clogs and Incumbrances of these earthly Bodies, we shall awake as agile and vigorous as the Light itself, and spend the whole Eternity not in gazing and sitting still, as some are apt to fancy, but in exerting our Powers and Faculties perpetually to the noblest Purposes possible ; namely, in loving God, in searching into his wonderful Works, in being enravished with all his wise Contrivances, in continually singing Praises to our great and good Creator and Redeemer, and in doing all the kind Offices we possibly can to our Fellow-creatures ; and this without any Weariness and Decay of Spirit, but with perpetual Alacrity and Pleasure, and Joy ; which indeed I take to be the greatest Gem in that Crown of Righteousness which shall be bestowed upon Believers at the Last Day. So that, really, that Care, that Industry, and Watchfulness which Religion in this Life puts us upon, is not a Thing that ought to be accounted as Matter of Objection, but rather as that which tends to the Increase of our Happiness, and makes us enjoy ourselves the better. That is the Sum of the Fifth Point.

But then, Sixthly and Lastly, to come to a Conclusion, there is this also to be added, which of itself alone (tho' there should have been little Force in what has been hitherto said) will be of Weight enough to

make out the Thing I am to prove ; and that is this :

Let all the Hardships and Difficulties of Religion be magnified as much as we please, yet the mighty Motives and Encouragements we have from the Gospel of Christ to undertake that Way, will very much out-weigh them.

We have acknowledged all along, that there are Difficulties in the Christian Life ; Difficulties that arise both from the Strictness of that Rule we are obliged to walk by, but more-especially from that Averseness we have to it thro' our being engaged in contrary Practices. But let us also suppose that there are yet greater Difficulties in a religious Life ; let us admit, that to enter upon this Course is the readiest way to spoil all our temporal Designs, and to ruin us as to all our Hopes in this World ; let us admit, that nothing but Reproach, and Ignominy, and Persecution will attend us, if we engage in this Course of Life : Yet, I say, admitting all this, a Life of Virtue and Religion, will, notwithstanding, to a considering Man, be far more easy and far more eligible, than the contrary way of living, tho' it have never so many outward secular Advantages to recommend it.

Let us put the Case, that a Man cannot do his Duty to God, without being reduced to the utmost Streights, and greatest Extremity ; (which yet, God be thanked ! is not now true
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among us, nor have we any reason to suppose such a Thing) but such Things may come upon us, and therefore let us put the Case:

Why, I say, let the worst come to the worst, yet still, all Things considered, what God requires of us, is no hard, no grievous Imposition, upon these three Accounts: I shall just name them, and so leave them, because I doubt I have already too much exercised your Patience.

First of all; Let the Difficulties of Religion be never so great, yet we have God's Promise, that he will stand by us, and enable us both to support them, and to overcome them, if we ourselves be but honest. The Apostle hath, in God's Name, assured us, that no Temptation shall ever happen to us, but either such as is common to Men; that is, such a Temptation as a Man is ordinarily exposed to, and may and doth as ordinarily overcome: Or if they be extraordinary Temptations; yet, of what Kind soever they be, God will provide us a Way to escape out of them; at least, we shall be able to bear them: *For God is faithful, and will never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able.* Thus Saint Paul encourages us, in the xth Chap. of the 1st Epist. Corinthians, Ver. 13.

And thus much we may certainly gather from his Words, That be the Trials and Difficulties we are exposed to, great or small;

ordinary or extraordinary; be likewise our Strength and Courage, to our thinking, never so unequal to them, yet God will never lay any Thing upon us, but what he will give us Strength to go thro' with. And if we be fortified and enabled to vanquish the Temptations, it is all one whether we be tempted, or no: Or rather, to speak truly, it is much better for us thus to be tempted; since, by our overcoming the Temptation, we prepare to ourselves a great Degree of Rewards in the other World.

But, Secondly; Tho' our Religion were attended with very great Difficulties, yet is there nothing in that Peace of Conscience which every good Man enjoys, while he pursues honest and virtuous Ways, for the smoothing those Difficulties? Is not the inward Comfort, and Satisfaction, and Joy that a Man reaps from discharging his Conscience, and doing his Duty, even then when he is persecuted for it, of some Force to alleviate all the outward Pressures and Afflictions he undergoes on that Account? Sure it is.

I would gladly ask any Man living, whether a Man that lives in all outward Prosperity, hath every Thing according to his own Heart's Desire in this World, and yet is a Knave, or an Hypocrite, and hath the Stings of a guilty Conscience perpetually pursuing him; or an innocent virtuous Person that suffers mightily in this World, but yet his
Mind

Mind reproaches him with nothing that he hath done, but he hath a continual Feast of a good Conscience, as *Solomon* phraseth it; I say, I would ask any one, whether of these is more to be pitied? I dare say, all will agree, that the former outwardly happy Man is much the more miserable and pitiable of the two.

But, Thirdly, to conclude; If to this we add the mighty unspeakable Rewards that are promised to all faithful persevering Christians in the World, and the sad Portion that doth await all wicked ungodly Men; let the Difficulties of Religion be never so great; let the Cross and Persecution they suffer for it be never so severe; yet there will be no Comparison, no Competition between Sin and Virtue, which of them is the easier, and which of them most recommends itself to the Choice of Mankind.

Let our Condition in this World be never so happy and prosperous, yet is it an easy Matter for us to think of dwelling in everlasting Burnings? Can we, for a little Bravery and Splendor, a little Pleasure and Gratification of our brutish Appetites, which we are not certain will last for a Year, or a Month, or a Day; I say, Can we for this venture, (no, it is not a Venture) Can we for this sell our Souls and Bodies to the Devil, to be for ever tormented? Is this a Bargain that we can any way please ourselves with the

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Thoughts of? On the other side, if we be sincere Lovers of God, and Disciples of our Lord Jesus, in what miserable Circumstances soever we are in the World, will it not be sufficient to revive our drooping Spirits? Will it not be a Cordial to us, in the midst of all our Afflictions and Tribulations, to think that we are the Sons of the most High God, and that we shall be glorified with our Saviour, when he comes to appear triumphantly in the View of Angels and Men, to distribute his Rewards to all his faithful Servants; and that for our light Affliction that endureth but for a Moment, we shall receive a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory?

Sure these Things will not bear a Comparison. But every one that hath his Wits about him, must, out of the Evidence of Truth, be forced to cry out, that, all Things considered, it is more easy, more safe, more desirable, more delightful to be good, to serve God, to live in Obedience to his Laws, and to discharge a good Conscience, than to enjoy all the Pleasures of Sin, which are but for a short Season.

May God Almighty, by his Spirit, convince us all of the Truth of this! And, upon that Conviction, may we all seriously apply ourselves to the Mortification of all our sinful Habits, and to the Study and Pursuit

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Pursuit of that which is good! That so we may have the comfortable Effects of our Labour in this Life in solid Peace and Tranquillity of Mind, and the glorious Rewards that God hath made over to all good Men in the Life to come, by Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.



SER-



SERMON XVI.

HEBREWS XIII. 18.

— *We trust we have a good Conscience, in all Things willing to live honestly.*



THAT every one of us may be able thus to say with St. Paul, ought to be our most serious Endeavours, because it is our highest Concernment. To have a good Conscience, is the greatest Duty, and the greatest Felicity in the World; as, on the contrary, an evil Conscience is the worst of Calamities. Upon our Conscience being good or bad, depends all the Happiness or Misery of our Lives, both as to this present State, and that which is to come: *He that hath a good Conscience hath a continual Feast*, as Solomon expresseth it: He hath that which gives Relish to all his Enjoyments, and Comfort and Support under all his Misfortunes; that which makes him pleasant and joyful in good Circumstances, and at least contented in the worst; and, which is more than all this, he hath

bath that which is both the Evidence and the Anticipation of a future glorious Immortality. As, on the other side, an evil Conscience is both a Man's Crime, and his Tormentor: It is that which makes him hated of God, and of himself: It is that which spoils and imbitters the most prosperous Fortune in the World, but makes all afflictions intolerable; but, as if all this was too little, as it puts us out of the Favour of God in this World, so without Repentance, and putting it away, it excludes us from all Hopes of his Favour in the World to come. Happy therefore are they that can say with *St. Paul*, in the Text, *We trust we have a good Conscience.*

But what is it that makes a good Conscience? That is our present Inquiry. Conscience, taken in general, is nothing else but a Man's Judgment or Persuasion concerning moral Good or Evil, or concerning what he ought to do, and what he ought not to do, and what he lawfully may do.

Now, according to this Definition of Conscience, one at the first Sound of the Phrase, would perhaps be apt to think, that that should be a good Conscience, wherein a Man's Judgment was rightly and truly instructed as to these Matters; that is, where he had right Notions of Duty and Sin, lawful or unlawful; as, on the other side, that should be a bad Conscience, where a Man was mis-informed, and mistaken in his Notions about these
Points;

Points: But we must have a Care of talking thus; a good Conscience or a bad, carries a great deal more in it than this comes to.

When a Man hath true Notions of his Duty, or of what is lawful or unlawful, we say that he hath a right Conscience; but we do not say he hath a good Conscience upon that Account. And so, where a Man is misinformed as to the Goodness or Badness of an Action, that we call an erroneous Conscience; but it doth not therefore follow, that it is always an evil Conscience. Again; As to this Business of a good Conscience, we must also distinguish between acting with a good Conscience, and having a good Conscience: For as these Terms are commonly used, there is a great Difference between them, just as much as there is between a single Action, and a Course of Life. Thus, a Man is said to act with a good Conscience, when he performs any particular Action as he judges he ought to do, so that his Conscience doth not reproach him for that Fact. But now to have a good Conscience, is quite another Thing, and respects not only this or the other particular Action that a Man doth, but the whole Course and Tenor of his Life. A Man may act with a good Conscience in twenty Instances, and yet not have a good Conscience; because he may not have the same Care of all his Actions that he hath of some of them.

Well,

Well, but what is it then that makes a good Conscience? Or, how shall a Man know when he hath it? Why, for the resolving of this, I think we cannot have better Directions than the Apostles Words in the Text; *We trust* (saith he) *that we have a good Conscience, being in all Things willing to live honestly*: Which is as much as if he had said, Our being willing in all Things to live honestly, is that from whence we conclude that we have a good Conscience. So that, according to him, that is the Rule and Standard whereby a good Conscience is to be measured.

But what is it to live honestly? Why, every body knows the Meaning of that Phrase: It is to frame our Lives according to the Laws of Virtue and Religion; it is to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godlily in this present World. And, in the second Place, To be willing to live honestly, doth import, not only a bare Wish, or ineffectual Desire so to do, but a most serious, settled, and constant Resolution and Endeavour throughout the Course of our Lives. And then, lastly, This Resolution and Endeavour to live honestly must be universal, not only in some Instances or Things, but in all Things: *In all Things* (saith the Text) *being willing to live honestly*.

This then is the great Thing whereby we can evidence to ourselves or others, that we
have

have a good Conscience; namely, our sincere Resolutions; and our constant Endeavours to approve ourselves to God and Man, by a holy Christian Conversation.

This is the very Account that the same St. Paul gives us of this Matter, in other Passages of his Writings; *This* (saith he) *is our Rejoicing, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, we have had our Conversation in the World.* And here-in (saith he) *do I exercise myself, to have a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Man.* And, lastly, to name no more Scriptures, that which St. Peter in the 1st Epistle, and the iii^d Chapter, in the Beginning of the Verse, calls *a good Conscience*; he doth in the End of the Verse, explain by *a good Conversation in Christ*; or *a good Christian Conversation.*

But now, for the more particular Explication of the Nature of a good Conscience, and for the better enabling us to examine ourselves whether we have it or no, I shall here do two Things:

First; Give an Account of what Things are not required to the having a good Conscience; or, which is the same thing, what Imperfections and Sins are consistent therewith. And,

Secondly; What Things are required to a good Conscience, and what Sins are inconsistent with it; and this shall be my Work at this time.

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I begin with the First Point, What Things are not required to a good Conscience; or, what Imperfections and Sins are consistent therewith. And here we say, First of all, It is not required, to the having a good Conscience, that a Man should be free from all Errors, and Mistakes of Judgment, in Matters of Religion, or in Matters that concern his Duty. Every Man is indeed bound to apply himself with all Seriousness, according as he hath Ability and Opportunity, to the learning of Divine Truths, especially such Truths as do more immediately concern his Practice. But yet, after all Endeavours, tho' they be performed with great Integrity, it is not only possible, but frequently seen, that good Men are ignorant of many Things, and mistaken in many Things, and this without any Prejudice to their Sincerity. A Man may be most heartily willing and resolved in all Things to live honestly, (which *St. Paul* here makes the Measure of a good Conscience) and yet entertain a great many false Opinions of Things, and Things too that relate to the very Practice of Religion.

I would not here be thought to patronize or defend any Man's Errors or Mis-perceptions in Religion: But this I say, A great many Errors (nay, tho' they may, in some Sense, be sinful Errors) may consist with a good Conscience, because certainly Sins of Ignorance may. But now, to make any Error or Mis-

Mis-persuasion in Religion, an innocent Mistake, or, at most, a Sin of Ignorance, there are these three Things required, which I shall but just name; only be pleased to take Notice, that I here speak of such Errors and Mis-persuasions as are incident to Men that profess Christianity.

First; It is required, that they be not such Errors as are destructive of the Christian Religion; such Opinions and Persuasions as subvert and overthrow the Foundation of Faith, or any Part of it. Mis-persuasions of this Kind are not only simple Errors, but Heresies; and so far as any Man falls into them, so far he forsakes his Christianity, departs from the Faith of Christ; which none can be supposed to do in a Christian Church thro' pure Weakness of Understanding, but thro' gross Corruption and Malice in the Will. And therefore it is, that Saint *Paul* reckons Heresies amongst the Works of the Flesh.

Secondly; To make any Error or Mis-persuasion consistent with a good Conscience, it is required, that it be not such an Error as engages a Man in any apparently sinful or ungodly Practice. If a Man's Opinion be such, that it puts him upon carrying on Designs, and doing Actions, that are plainly and openly contradictory to the Laws of God, or the common Rules of Honesty and Morality; this Opinion, how strongly so-
ever

soever it is believed, is not an innocent Mistake, but a Piece of Wickedness in the Man that holds it. For the Principles of Virtue, and Honesty, and Morality lie so plainly and convincingly before every Man's Conscience, who hath been used to think, that he must be wilfully blind that doth not see them; and consequently, not so sincere as he should be, that will espouse any Tenent that shall give him Liberty in his Practice to contradict them.

But, Thirdly; In order to the excusing any Error, as a Weakness of the Understanding, or as a Sin of Ignorance, and rendering it consistent with a good Conscience, it is required, that it be rather taken up involuntary, and thro' some Disadvantage or other in our Circumstances, which we could not well remedy, than thro' gross Carelessness, and a wilful Neglect or Refusal to use those Means of Conviction, which God hath afforded us. There is a great deal of Difference as to the Criminalness of false Persuasions upon this account; the same Error which one Person may hold very pardonably, (as being, without much Fault of his own, either thro' Weakness of Parts, or Prejudice from Education, or Want of Opportunity of knowing better, unavoidably, in a manner, led into it: I say, that very same Error) may be extremely dangerous in other Persons that have better Parts, and have had a better Education,

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and enjoy more Opportunities of informing themselves right in those Points; so especially if there be any secret Taint of Pride, or Lust, or Peevishness, or Ambition or Covetousness, or the like, that doth influence their Understandings, and keep them from coming to the Knowledge of the Truth. But I have not Time to dwell upon this.

In the second Place, (to come to another Head of Things, which are consistent with a good Conscience) as we say, All Errors of the Understanding, which proceed from human Weakness, do not violate a good Conscience; so we say, in the Second Place, That neither are any Sins in our Practice, which may be truly called Sins of Infirmary, inconsistent with it.

It is not required to a Man's having a good Conscience, that he should keep the Commandments of God in all Instances, that he should always, in all Points, live up to his Duty, and never be guilty of any Transgression which he knows to be such: No, the Conditions of the Gospel Covenant made by Christ Jesus with Mankind for their Salvation, were never designed to be so hard, nor is there any Colour throughout the New Testament for such a severe Assertion: Nor indeed is it perhaps possible for any Man thus to live; or, if any Man do, he is extraordinary; tho', in Truth, I believe that Man is scarce to be found that doth conceit of himself, in cold Blood, that he doth thus live: On the contrary,

trary, the more pious, and virtuous, and devout any Man is, generally the more sensible he is of many Irregularities, and Slips, and Miscarriages in his Life. This is certain, that any Sin may stand with a good Conscience, that will stand with a Man's hearty and sincere Resolutions, and constant Endeavours to live honestly in all Things: And therefore, tho' a Man may be conscious to himself of abundance of Frailties, and Infirmities, and Imperfections in his Life, and those both in his inward Desires, and Appetites, and Affections, and in his outward Words and Actions; yet so long as he can, upon good Grounds, satisfy himself that he doth honestly endeavour, in the main and general Course of his Life to serve God, and to mortify his Lusts, and to do his Duty in all respects, and heartily prays and labours to grow better; his Frailties, of what Nature soever they be, will never be imputed to him in the other World; but will be washed away by the Blood of Christ, thro' an habitual Repentance, tho' he should never live perfectly to conquer those Infirmities.

But, Thirdly and Lastly; Let me add one Proposition more upon this Point, and I shall conclude it. As Sins of Ignorance, and Sins of Infirmity, are reconcileable with a good Conscience; so likewise are all passed Sins of what Kind soever, whether actual or habitual, reconcileable with it, supposing we have

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sincerely repented of them. It is not required, in order to the having a good Conscience, that a Man should all his Life have been innocent, or at least have been only attended with the common Frailties of human Nature: No; God hath no-where made this the Condition of our Salvation. That which Christ hath required of us, is, not that a Man should have been always virtuous, but, if he hath been vicious, that he should be penitent. This, I am sure, is the Tenor of the Gospel-Covenant. All Men whatsoever, let them have been never so great Sinners, let their Offences have been multiplied to never so great a Number, and heightened with never so aggravating Circumstances, yet, if they truly repent of them, if they come to God with hearty Contrition for what is passed, and sincere Resolutions and Endeavours to become better for the time to come; all these Men, I say, are Objects of the Mercies of the Gospel; and our Lord hath promised to receive them, and own them for his Disciples, and to reward them as such.

St. *Paul* himself was in the Number of those Men that we are speaking of; he had been a bitter Persecutor of Christ's Religion, and he confesseth of himself that he was the greatest of Sinners: But yet this very Man, as bad as he thought himself to have been, after he had repented of his Sins, and become
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a sincere Disciple of Christ, doubted not to say of himself, notwithstanding all his former Iniquities, *We trust we have a good Conscience, &c.*

Having thus given an Account of what Things are consistent with a good Conscience, which was the first Thing I was to do; I now come to the other, that is, To shew what Things are inconsistent with it. And here the general Proposition is, That whatever is irreconcilable with a Man's hearty endeavouring in all Things to live honestly, all that is irreconcilable with a good Conscience. Now, there are two Things, which every one, at the first hearing of them, will be convinced are required, in order to any Man's being willing to live honestly in all Things.

First; That he be very sincere in his Purposes, and Desires, and Endeavours. And,

Secondly; That those Purposes, and Desires, and Endeavours do extend to all Instances of his Duty.

Now, opposite to this Sincerity and Universality of Endeavour, are all Sorts of Hypocrisy on one hand; and all partial Obedience to God's Laws on the other: Neither of which therefore can consist with a good Conscience. It is a needless Thing to go about nicely and laboriously to give an Account what it is to be sincere or hypocritical in our Desires and Endeavours, and what it is to be impartial or partial in them; for every Man doth rea-

dily understand those Things: He must either want natural Parts, or be extremely under the Power of Melancholy, that is not a competent Judge of his own Sincerity or Insincerity, so that he doth not very well know when he lays out his faithful and hearty Endeavours to do his Duty in all Instances, and when only in a few.

Instead therefore of a strict Prosecution of this Argument, I think it better to treat of it in a popular way; that is to say, for the assisting every one of you to apply these Generals to your own particular Cases. I shall set before you some of the most common and usual States and Conditions of Men among us, which may plainly be convinced either of Sincerity or Partiality, and consequently are irreconcilable with a good Conscience.

And, First of all; As for all atheistical, profane, lewd, debauched Persons, that have little Sense of Religion or Honesty, but live in this World, as if they neither feared God, or regarded Men, the whole Business and Design of whose Lives is the Satisfaction of their covetous or ambitious Desires, or the Gratification of their brutish Appetites, for the attaining of which they stick at nothing: As to these Men, I say, it is a needless Thing to ask whether they have a good Conscience; for it is rather a Question whether they have any Conscience at all; whether they have not sinned themselves beyond all the Apprehensions

prehenſions and Diſcriminations of what is Good, and what is Evil: And therefore, if this kind of Men do live at Peace within themſelves, if they be ſeldom or never haunted with troubleſome and vexatious Reflections upon their own Courſe of Life, this is no Argument in the World that they have a good Conſcience; but rather that God hath wholly forſaken them, and given them up to Hardneſs of Heart, and a reprobate Mind, which, of all Conditions on this ſide Damnation, is the moſt dreadful.

But, Secondly; What ſhall we ſay of the negligent and careleſs ſort of Men, ſuch as are not indeed openly wicked, or profane, or impious, nor are they guilty of any ſuch enormous ſcandalous Crimes, as either blemiſh their Reputations in the World, or render them obnoxious to human Laws; but in the mean time they live in an habitual Careleſneſs, as to all that concerns their Souls, or the other World: They have no Senſe of God or Religion upon their Minds; tho' perhaps they may make a Practice of coming to Church as other Chriſtians do, yet they hardly know what it is either there, or in their Cloſets, heartily and fervently to ſay their Prayers: They know not what it is to bewail their Sins, or ſeriously to make Reſolutions againſt them, or to ſet themſelves in good earneſt to the rooting out of any vicious Inclination that they labour under: But

they spend their Days either in a Course of Pleasure, or a Hurry of worldly Cares and Business, or else perhaps in a dull, lazy, unthinking way; and the greatest Comfort they can give to themselves, is, that tho' they do no great Good in the World, yet they do no great Harm: Can these Men, with any Justice, pretend to a good Conscience? No, certainly, they cannot; for they cannot with any Colour or Reason, say of themselves, that they are in all Things willing to live honestly. If they were, how was it possible for them to live in a gross wilful Neglect of all the Duties that do more immediately relate to God, and of all the Methods of Christ Jesus, by which a new Principle, or Holiness, or Regeneration, is to be attained? We are to know, that Sins of Omission, if they be habitual and customary, and in such Things without which an holy Christian Life cannot be maintained; I say, such Omissions as these are as certainly damnable, as a Course of vicious and wicked Actions.

But, Thirdly; What shall we say of another sort of Men, that seem to be religious, but are not inwardly so; that make a Shew of Piety in their Conversation, but it is only for the serving some private Turn? Can any of these Men plead a Title to a good Conscience? Oh, No; they are the farthest from it that it is possible. Not but I think it much better and more tolerable to have the
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Form of Godliness, tho' without the Power of it, than to be without both Power and Form too: Yet, certainly, let the Form and Appearances that those Men make, be never so fair and specious, yet if their Minds be of a different Complexion from the outward Behaviour; if Impurity and Wickedness be lodged under a Vizard of Piety; if their good Actions be done to be seen of Men, that so they may advance their Reputation and Interest in the World; if any private Ends be carried on of Covetousness, or Lust, or worldly Greatness, for the accomplishing of which all this Shew of Religion is intended; these are the veriest Hypocrites in the World, and, of all sorts of Hypocrites, are the most odious to God: For these are the painted Sepulchres our Saviour speaks of, which appear glorious without, but inwardly are full of Rottenness, and dead Mens Bones: These are those that, as he saith, do justify themselves before Men; but God knoweth their Hearts; and that which is highly esteemed of in those Men by all that see them, is abominable in the Sight of God.

But, Fourthly; There are another sort of Men, that are no ways guilty of that Hypocrisy I have been now proving; but, as far as their Religion goes, it is very sincere: They have abundance of good Desires and Purposes; and when, upon any occasion, they are brought

brought to examine the State of their own Minds and Consciences, they are extremely troubled to find that they have made no great Progress in Virtue, but are under the Tyranny of so many evil Habits: Their Hearts are really affected with the Sense of Religion; and when, at the stated Seasons of the Year, they repair with other Christians, to the holy Communion, they do it with great Devotion, and they are full of good Purposes and Resolutions to mend their Ways. But yet all this Religion of theirs is not of Force and Strength enough to conquer any one of their evil Habits, any one of those reigning Lusts, which enthrall them, and lead them Captive at Will and Pleasure. They often wish they were Good, and desire not only to die the Death, but also to live the Life, of the Righteous: But still this Wish or Desire never proceeds farther than a bare Purpose of setting themselves some time or other, to be what they wish to be; for still they continue as bad as they were, whatever the prevailing Sins of their Life be, whether a Course of profane Swearing, or irreligious Talking; a Course of Drunkenness, or Revelling; a Course of Gaming, or keeping idle Company, to the Neglect of their Callings and Family; a Course of Lewdness, and unlawful Love; a Course of indirect Dealings in their Calling; a Course of uncharitable Censuring and Rail-
ing,

ing, and Slandering, and Backbiting; I say, of what Nature or Kind soever their evil Habits and Customs are, they do not quit any of them for all their good Desires, and good Resolutions.

This, God knows, is the Case of too many that profess Christianity among us: What now shall we say to these? Can these Men be said to have a good Conscience upon account of their many good Wishes, and Desires, and Purposes? No, I dare not say they have: If indeed they grow better upon these their Wishes and Purposes, tho' they did not on a sudden become so holy and virtuous as they ought to be; yet I would say, they were in a way to a good Conscience, because they had done something towards a Reformation, and might, by the Grace of God, go farther. But when they have nothing but Conviction upon their Minds that they ought to live better, and now and then a good Wish that they did so; but yet, for all that, they do not amend, but run on in the old Road, whenever a Temptation presents itself, they can be no more entitled to the Name of a good Conscience, than they can be entitled to the Name of sober, temperate, chaste, diligent, serious, upright, regular Men, when yet they are not so indeed, but only desire so to be. If they were heartily and sincerely willing in all Things to live honestly, which is Saint Paul's

Paul's Measure of a good Conscience, they would certainly live so. That the Will is not a sincere Will that doth not obtain its Effect in all those Matters which are so plainly in our Power as these are, that we are now speaking of. If they were indeed desirous to approve themselves to God, they would strive against those Sins which hold them in Captivity; they would every Day fortify their Resolutions; they would, as much as they could, avoid the Temptations; they would use twenty Methods to keep themselves out of the Snare, or to break thro' it, which every prudent Man could readily suggest to himself. All this they would do, if they were in good earnest in this Matter: And if they did this, they would, in a little time, be certainly Masters of their own Desires, and live as they ought to do: But, in the mean time, so long as they live as they do, they must not flatter themselves with a Conceit that they have a good Conscience; for no Course of open wilful Sin (as all the Sins I have been now insisting on are such) can be reconciled to a good Conscience. It is in this Sense that St. James speaks, when he tells us, That he that breaketh one of God's Commandments is guilty of all: And St. John, Whosoever committeth Sin is of the Devil; and no one that is born of God can commit Sin: And, lastly, that our Saviour speaks,

speaks, when he cries out, *Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the Things which I command you.*

But to leave this Head, and go on; for I would willingly, upon this Occasion, take notice of all the common Artifices and Deceits wherewith Men are apt to impose upon themselves in this Business of a good Conscience:

In the fifth Place; There are a Sort of Men that value themselves upon their moral Honesty and Justice in their Dealings between Man and Man. They have not, indeed, as they confess of themselves, been so careful, and regular, and devout in their Lives, as they should have been; but yet, they thank God, they have a good Conscience; they have wronged no Man; they are in Charity with all the World; they pay every body their own; and what they have, they are come honestly and fairly by.

Thus, indeed, in common Language, hath Justice between Man and Man engrossed to itself the Name of a good Conscience; and it is chiefly Oppressors and Extortioners, covetous and griping Men, Knaves and Cheats, that we reproach with the Name of unconscionable Men, or Men of no Conscience. Thus far indeed is true, that upright Dealing between Man and Man, in all our Conversation, especially where Mercy and Charity

rity have been joined with that Dealing, doth make a fair Step towards a good Conscience; and, on the contrary, all kind of Injustice, and Extortion, and Oppression or Cruelty, are certain Signs or Instances of an evil Conscience, or no Conscience; and on such Persons God will have no Mercy: But then it is always to be remembered, that just Dealing with Man is Part of our Duty, and not the Whole; nay, besides that, at the same time that we are just and fair in our Negotiations with Men, we may at the same time, I say, be horribly unjust to God, and ourselves also. So that, unless a Man can think that his fair Usage of his Neighbour in the Course of his Trade, will make Atonement and Compensation for the ill Usage of God, and of himself, in all the rest of his Conversation, by Profaneness, Irreligion, Drunkenness, Luxury, and the like, he cannot, upon this single Account of moral Honesty, as they call it, satisfy himself that he hath a good Conscience. He that will entitle himself to that, must (as we have often said) endeavour in all Things to live honestly, which such a Man as this doth not.

But, Sixthly, and Lastly; There is another Notion of a good Conscience, which too commonly passeth among some of us, which is different from all these I have named, and it is this; Mens satisfying themselves with their

their being heartily zealous about some outward Forms or Modes of Religion, which, either upon Choice or Chance, they have pitched upon as the best, and making their Zeal for these Things to be true Marks of their sincere Piety. Thus, for Instance, some among us think themselves Christians, merely for being Members of our Church, and heartily complying with its Constitutions, and shewing a great Zeal against all those that are of a different Communion from us (whether Papists or Sectaries.) Others are as much satisfied of their Title to God's Favour, merely upon account of their opposing our Constitution, and joining themselves to some godly Party that are against all human Inventions in the Worship of God, (by which Name they are pleased to call that way of Worship which is established among us:) With these Men it is a main Evidence of their being sincerely religious, to make Scruples and Difficulties in such plain Things where another Man would make none. A Form, or a Ceremony, or a Gesture, tho' never so ancient in the Church, never so decent or innocent in itself, gives them as great a Shock, and raiseth as great an Outcry, as if Christianity itself was in Danger; and, upon account of this their unreasonable Niceness and Scrupulosity, they would appropriate to themselves the Name of

of tender Consciences; which indeed is the higheſt Inſtance of a good Conſcience.

As to the Firſt of theſe I mentioned, thoſe that do ſincerely embrace Chriſt's Religion, and the Worſhip of God in the Way that it is held forth and eſtabliſhed in the Church of *England*, I deſire Leave to ſay this to them; That tho' I do in my Conſcience believe that there is no Church in the World wherein the Religion of Chriſt is more purely taught, or his Sacraments more duly adminiſtered, than in this Church, and conſequently in the Communion of which a Man may more ſafely venture his everlaſting Salvation; yet let them not deceive themſelves, neither the Goſpel of Chriſt, nor the Doctrines of his Church, do give them any Hopes of Happineſs hereafter, unleſs, to their holy Profeſſion, they add an holy Life and Converſation.

And as for the Tender-conſcienſed Men I mentioned in the Second-Place, (be they of what Sect, or Perſuaſion, or Denomination ſoever they pleaſe) nay, tho' they be arrived to that Tenderneſs of Conſcience, that they ſcruple as much the Uſe of civil Ceremonies, as the reſt of them do religious; and are come to refine upon Thou and You, Yea and Yes, the Reſpect of the Hat, and twenty other ſuch Things

Things, which they make serious Matters of Conscience of; as to these, I say, That tho' I meddle not with their Opinions and Persuasions, (which I leave to God, the Searcher of all Hearts, to judge how far they are innocently or invincibly taken up, and how far they shall answer for them as taken up by their own Fault); yet let them not presume that this Tenderness of Conscience of theirs, as they call it, is any Argument in the World of a good Conscience, unless they can satisfy themselves that they are as tender-conscienced in all the other Parts and Instances of their Duty, (which they are convinced, both in Nature and Revelation, to be their Duty) as they are in such Things which they lay so great a Stress upon. Let them therefore ask themselves these Questions: Are they as careful about all the substantial Parts of God's Worship, as they are in such Circumstantials? Do they make a Conscience of being just in all their Dealings; of being innocent in all their Conversation; of being peaceable among their Neighbours; of living without Offence to the Government that protects them? Are they kind and candid to all them that differ in Opinion from them, and avoid all Un-

charitableness in censuring and condemning others that are not of their Persuasion? In a Word; Do they in all their Conversation exercise themselves to have a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Man? These indeed are true Signs of a good and tender Conscience: But for Men to be wonderfully tender in their Consciences about the Outworks, as I may call them, of Religion, and yet not to be equally tender in other Matters, wherein the very Life and Soul of it doth consist; this is no Argument in the World of a good Conscience, but rather an Evidence to the contrary.

To conclude the whole Matter: The Sum of all is this; That no Man, of what Persuasion or Religion soever, can, with any good Grounds, hope to appear with a good Conscience before God in the next Life, or reap the solid Comfort of it in this, but only such a one as can truly satisfy himself, that he is most heartily willing, and doth sincerely endeavour in all Things to live honestly: Whatever is short of this, is short of a good Conscience; and whoever makes this good, may truly, and with great Comfort to himself, notwithstanding all his other Frailties and Infirmities, say with
St. Paul

The Sixteenth Sermon. 387

St. Paul in the Text, I trust I have a good Conscience.

Which that we may all have, God, of his infinite Mercy, grant, &c.

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